THE North American Review

ISSN 0029-2397 • SPRING 1975 $1.50

the great american love story
eleven fictions

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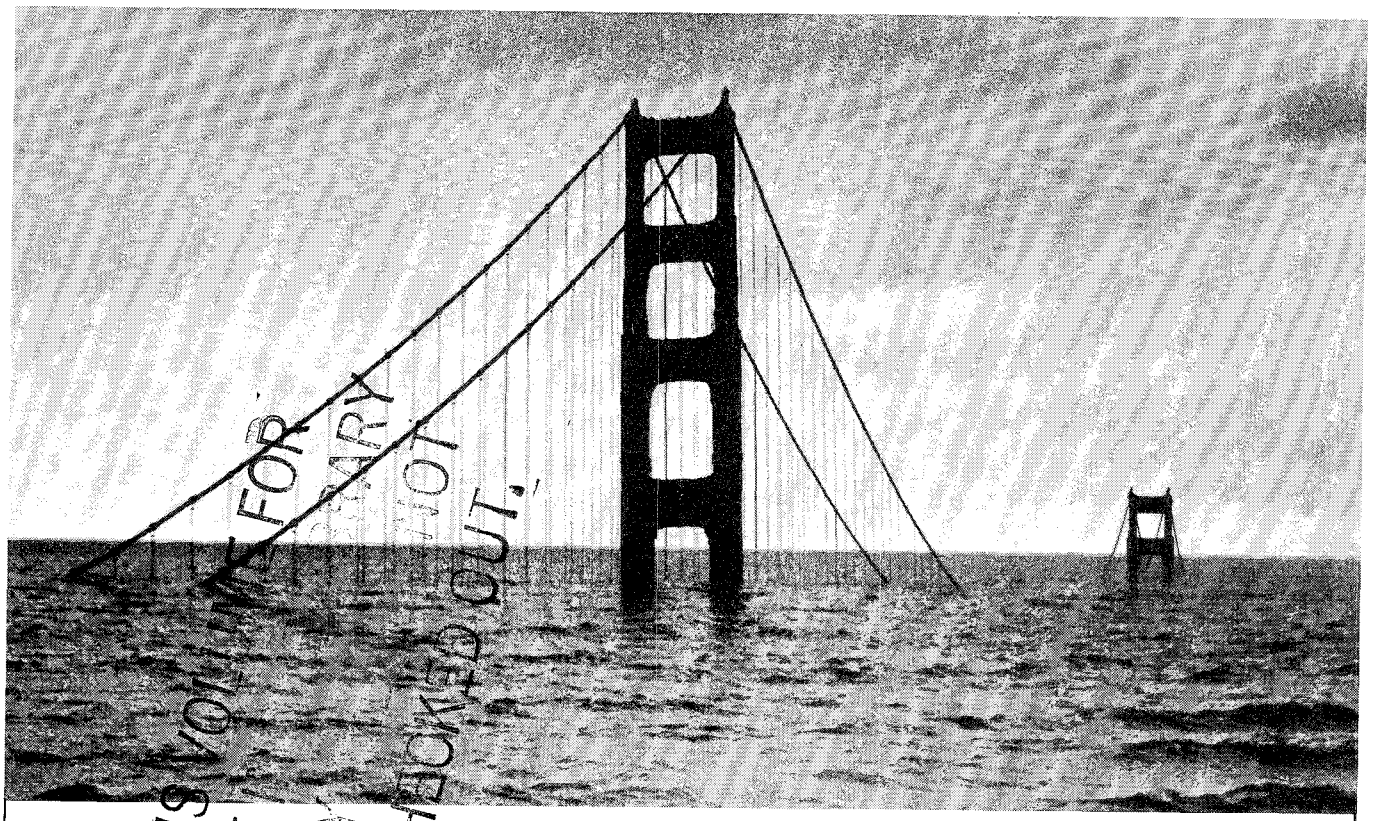

A probability report.

The Sierra Club doesn't say that our planet is likely to go under at any moment through our heedlessness. The composite photograph above merely depicts a possibility.

The probability is fairly remote.

Every day, however, we are making environmental changes with consequences we still don't understand or even suspect.

Take heat, for example.

Everytime we build a city block of high-rise buildings, we change the wind pattern so there's less wind to carry the heat away.

Everytime we heat or air-condition these buildings, use an electric appliance or light, drive a car or manufacture a product, 100% of that energy eventually winds up in the environment as heat.

And it's not only cities.

We know that when we clear a forest, the land beneath absorbs more heat. And this also happens when we plow fields, defoliate vegetation or take the life out of the soil. (One acre of grass, for example, has a potential cooling effect up to that of a 10-ton air conditioner.)

We are eliminating natural cooling systems and creating urban heat islands where the climate is hotter, rainier, cloudier, more humid and, of course, dirtier, too. These artificially created climates, called "microclimates" are already altering their immediate surrounding environment. And, if we create enough of them, we might alter the temperature of the entire earth.

One day as we approach the global heat limits, the polar ice caps could begin to melt, flooding some cities of the earth.

There are limits to the alterations we can make on our ecosystem. We would do well to slow the pace of change so we can determine these limits scientifically, before we discover them accidentally.

Sierra Club
Mills Tower San Francisco

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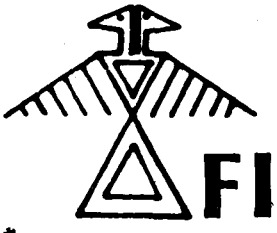

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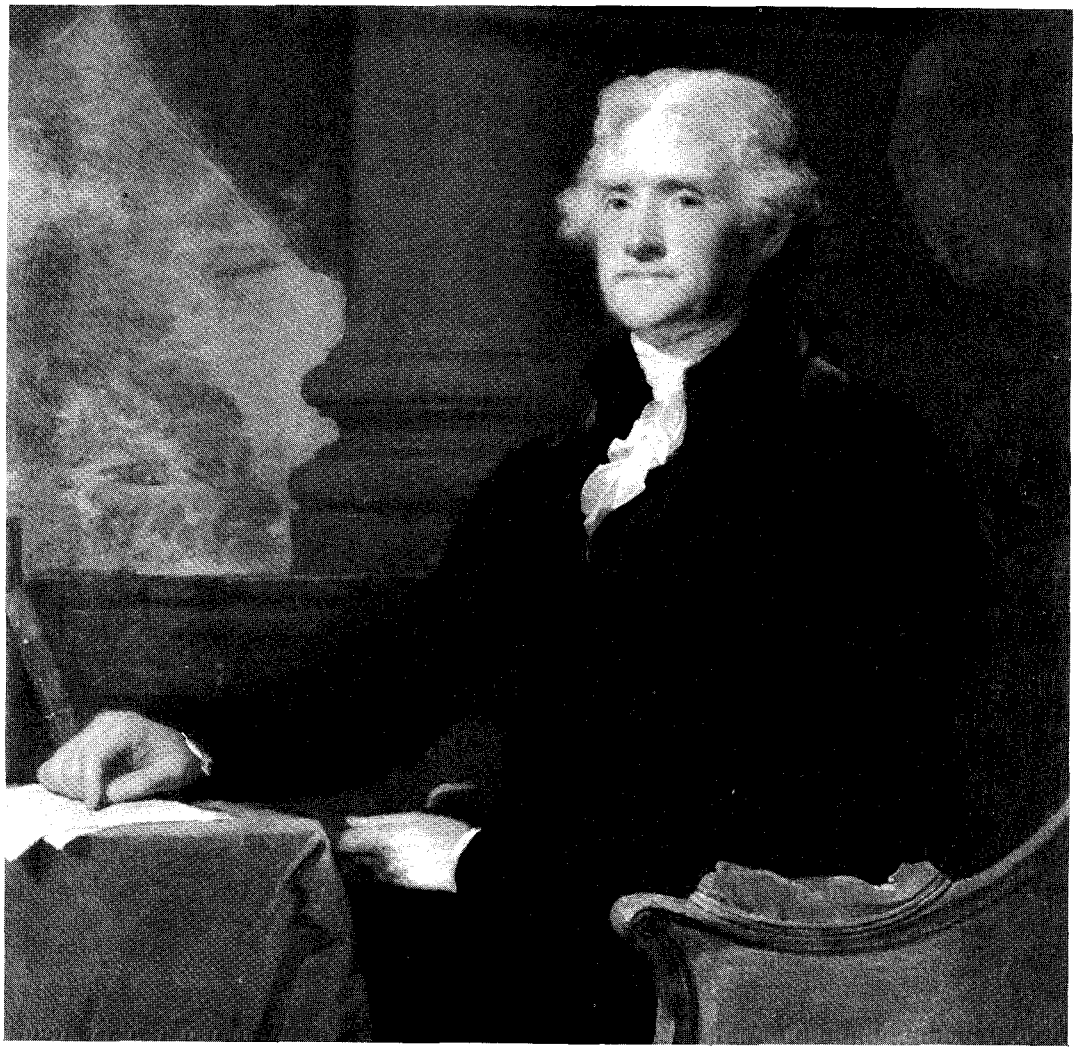

Sir Monticello Mar. 27. 25.

I am a subscriber to the N. American review and understand you are agent for that work in Richmond. it will be more convenient for me to have it furnished from that place because payment there is easier made. I shall be glad therefore to receive it from you. and this letter presented to Colo. Bernard Peyton of Richmond my corresp[t] will ensure your receiving payment from him on my account, once a year or oftener if you chuse. I have received No. 46. but not Nos. 44. and 45. which I shall be glad therefore now to receive. accept the assurance of my respect.

Th: J

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FOUNDED IN 1815
Vol. 260/No. 1/Spring 1975

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Editorial and Business offices: UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA, CEDAR FALLS, IOWA 50613
Rates: $1.50 A COPY; $6.00 A YEAR IN THE U.S. AND ITS POSSESSIONS, $6.15 IN CANADA AND LATIN AMERICA—ALL OTHER COUNTRIES $7.00 A YEAR

THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW, Spring 1975, Vol. 260, No. 1. Published quarterly in March, June, September, December, at the University of Northern Iowa, 1222 West 27th Street, Cedar Falls, Iowa 50613. Second Class postage paid at Cedar Falls, Iowa 50613. Printed in the U.S.A. Copyright © 1975 by the University of Northern Iowa. All rights, including translation into other languages, reserved. Opinions expressed by contributors do not necessarily reflect those of the editors or of the University of Northern Iowa. Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed envelope with return postage. **THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW** is indexed in Social Sciences and Humanities Index, Index to Little Magazines, Historical Abstracts, and the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature. Back file volumes are available from AMS Reprint Company, 56 East 13th Street, New York, N. Y. 10003, and from Xerox University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106. U. S. and Canadian national newsstand distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 155 West 15th Street, New York, N. Y. 10011.

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Kenneth Lash: . . . another man's poison

Money Has Gone Crazy

Four years ago I wrote (in *Change* magazine) that money was running round in circles, going crazy. Because it was being politicized. The politics of democracy, run essentially by a union-management coalition imaging itself as a seesaw, had reached the point of an attempt to translate into literal reality the fantasy of Affluence. $20-$30 an hour for a plumber. $13,000 a year for the New York City subway station window-washer. Sounds marvelous. Just what we deserve. That's the essence of fantasy. But when you translate fantasy literally i n s t e a d of metaphorically, you're crazy. Stick a hand behind your vest and take a plane to Waterloo.

The fantasy was that money is infinitely divisible, that it doesn't represent anything of a real, therefore, *limited* nature. Along comes the great Arab discovery that it does represent something real. Oil, for instance. So they get it together and begin dancing the dance of the crazed. Sheik Abdollah. Gold beyond the dreams of history. Enough in just a few days take to buy IBM, the glittering giant of the west. Enough in just 15 years to buy up every damn corporation listed on the New York Stock Exchange. Plus tanks, planes, armies, pulsar watches. The whole world, they can buy up.

Can they?

Kissinger and Ford stage-whisper the counter-magic word, "force." You keep being uppity, we gonna paratroop you (meanwhile selling them a zillion tons of guns, to get a million tons of oil to fuel the planes to drop our paratroops down onto the zillion tons of guns . . . .). Brezhnev doesn't say anything: he's got a bad cold (and a lot of oil). Force. War. Steal the oil. Maybe. It's crazy enough. And crazy begets crazy.

But meanwhile, even some of the Arabs are sensing the fact that cornering all the money in the world is indeed possible in reality, but if achieved would immediately—as in all the wise old tales—transfer reality to fantasy. Because once you have all the money, the game, as in Monopoly, is over. You want to begin again? You have to give the money back to the other players so you can win it all over again. Petrodollars. Can't work. Who can afford the interest? Most countries, like most people, can no longer afford to borrow. What's left? Trade for grain? Cement? Plastic? Postage stamps? The barter system. Maybe. Maybe after a thousand years of technological advance we will revert again, in this area, to the Medieval.

It is necessary to understand the nature and the historic achievement of money—an understanding that, as with currency itself, has come to be debased, with s t u p i d arguments among intelligentsia real or supposed, about whether money is "good" or "bad." It's neither. It's a discovery grown to an invention. An infinitely useful discovery.

Where it signifies capital and all the instrumentation developed for its creation and exchange, *money was the major technological advance of the western world.* Strong argument can be presented that the development of capital ended the Middle Ages, inaugurated the Renaissance, that money became the essential of all warring Europe and finally, ironically, the special property, the determinant, of the United States of America, the most powerful nation in western history and to that extent at least the exemplar, the Achievement.

It was always known that life required both necessities and decoration. Capital provided them in quantities never before known, changing the very definition of necessity, inventing private art, modifying for many the nature of the life experience. It was always known that man's food supply was subject to change, change so often incomprehensible that the work of gods and spirits was suspected. Money put out of work a lot of gods and spirits. (It would seem that when material security is within reach, spiritual security becomes less vital, a less *operative* factor.) Since money achieved so much for western man, it is natural to expect that he would elevate it to his pantheon. What one profoundly respects, he worships. Science, for example. The medieval scientist was a hippie crackpot, trying to turn lead into gold. And very properly so, since it is gold that eventually turned stone into the force that once was locked in story. Money and Science comprise the most successful marriage in the history of man. They adore each other. And why not? It was money which was able to transform carrots into time for scientific thinking and commodities for scientific doing. In return, science made possible the existence of more carrots. Almost perfect. Not perfect, because not ad infinitum (an historic problem with marriage).

Lastly, the development of capital altered western time . . . *and* space (movement). "Time is money," is not a joke, nor was it once a grossness. In the form of money, time could in fact be "saved." Twelve hours worth of carrots couldn't be; twelve hours worth of money could be. Saved. Stored. Bartered. *Moved.* I can move my twelve hours worth of carrot work from Flanders to Florence. Easily. Smoothly. In a half hour, with a piece of paper. In minutes with telegraphy. Once money began to operate, *mobility*—first of physical man, then of thinking man—became the major factor in western history. Communication. Synthesis. The prime mover.

Money, not oil, is the fuel of the

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current world. It is not that money is success. Blah. Money is *a* success. It has delivered. In modern history it has delivered every time it was asked. Until now. Until the last few years when it was stretched too far, couldn't cope, and took sick. Then OPEC rose up out of the desert ("What rough beast, its hour come round at last . . . . ") and rendered it insane.

You know money has gone crazy. I know it. Most economists don't, largely because they have rarely known anything much worth knowing, but now we see them cuckoo under their vested theories, their predictions as accurate and profound as televised weather predictions. Contemporary governments—and not only western—do seem to know that what is called the international monetary system has collapsed. They say, "is in imminent danger of collapse." What else can they say. Truth always creates fear; unpleasant truth about money, panics. People rush about like mad buying gold, pewter, platinum, pork bellies, old coins, old furniture, old dreams. The governments, presumably, "fight" inflation. No. They don't, they can't, they don't want to. As everyone knows, inflation is the greatest form of political taxation ever discovered. And taxation is the blood of government, a compulsory tranfusion from the individual. Governments try to *regulate* inflation, to keep it, like other taxes, at the edge of reasonableness. They know that to go beyond this edge kills my goose, cooks theirs. But they can't, now, regulate it. You can't "regulate" insanity; very few of us can even understand it. So day by day, month by month, the various governments of our contemporary world are banding together into politico-economic groups to stave off the craziness, to shuffle their resources back and forth among one another, and compete against the other groups in this game that started out as sophisticated Monopoly, and has now become basic survival. Gloves coming off.

Meanwhile in the U.S., the sons and daughters of the silent majority, sheep-like and late for the boat as always (they walk off the dock anyway, because the boat's *supposed* to be there), enroll in Business, the "hot" major. Better they should enroll in Hans Christian Andersen and do graduate work in Grimm.

It seems unlikely that "monetary reform" can succeed beyond the moment. There's no longer a world monetary system substantial enough to reform. It will probably have to be killed. (That awful-awesome new usage, "wasted.") Along with multinational corporations that were truly threatening to displace national governments (a greater motive even than financial gain in the contemporary wave of expropriation of foreign corporate holdings in many of the smaller nations).

It is not just that money is failing as a mode of distribution—tinkering might mend that—but rather that it is failing to represent twentieth century realities. It has become too abstract to deal with problems except theoretically. It is doing nothing

about present hunger and starvation (nor the agrarian reforms necessary to combat the reality of future hunger and starvation); it is doing nothing about reallocating prime resources to a furiously competing world (preferring to "recycle," i.e., reallocate only itself); it is doing nothing to recognize that its own success in determining rather than reflecting sociopolitical forms and processes has passed a point of diminishing returns and is inexorably drifting toward failure.

The failure of pricings and money is no less than a *failure of governing forms*. Money became The Marketplace; The Marketplace governed. It is now governing too badly. The signs are real, not theoretical: *more and more people are becoming more and more ungovernable by present forms.*

I understand that the book Walter Lippmann was working on when he died proposes the thesis that modern man is ungovernable. (I trust he included modern woman.) It's a very possible estimate. Perhaps even more ungovernable psychologically than politically. We have learned too much about wanting. Out of our real achievements came a valuing of ourselves, and then with awful irony and worse results, a valuing of ourselves above all. A psychological inflation both fed by and feeding, particularly in the U.S., material inflation. The dream of affluence became a hope, the hope an expectation . . . a *deserving*. The looming withdrawal first of the expectation, then of the hope, finally even of the dream is certain to produce trauma. Disappointment, frustration, anger, rage.

If we are now close to being ungovernable (note the state of "the law"), and if what we call our "pocketbook" is not just threatened but picked clean by monetary failure, then surely we will attack. Anything. Anybody. Without a viable monetary system there is inevitable anarchy, panic; and afterwards, after the orgy, totalitarian Authority, relief. Survival.

Certainly to survive is the great feat. Both for the individual and the species. To do so and at the same time let/help others survive is the great problem—the problem which people in the form of nations and governments have not to this day made an appreciable advance toward solving. This failure is so crucial, so enveloping, that like rotten local weather, societies try to make a virtue, a "manliness" of it. Force. As if destruction were a mode of survival. Never, unless attacked or hungry, and even then it is only a mortgaging of tomorrow. In all else, force is a form of relief by suicide.

Money has served as a form of force. That's where its bad reputation came from. But it was not a terminal force. Ordinarily it required at least the continued existence of its victim —something of an advance in the history of our thinking, ravaging species.

What shall we substitute for it? Politics plus money equaled force. Politics minus money equals force yet more direct. Our social dream was a flow toward god-like compassion; our reality is the beast-god, Technology. Its thundering demand is an old one: Your money or your life. Remember that great pause of Jack Benny's?—"I'm thinking! I'm thinking!" So we're thinking . . . while the proposed victim goes, suitably, mad.

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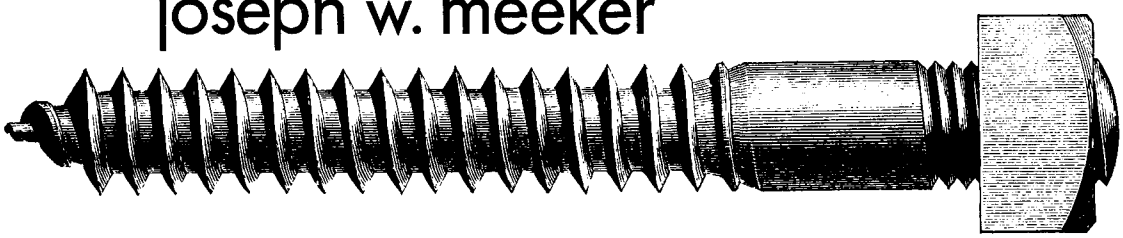
SCIENCE SERVES HUMANITY: HUMANITY RETURNS THE SERVE

joseph w. meeker



Rituals of greeting at academic conferences resemble in some respects those of a group of stray dogs meeting on an empty street. In both cases, there is much mutual sniffing and inspecting before normal social relations can proceed. At such meetings, dogs appear to ask many significant questions of one another, such as: are you male or female? what are your sexual needs? are you angry or friendly? are you more powerful than I, or less? Dogs need such precise information about one another before they can decide how to conduct themselves in public. Animals relate to one another on the basis of detailed and significant knowledge of one another, empirically verified and highly dependable. For dogs and for us, the encounter with others is a way to establish one's own identity.

Encounters among scientific and professional people at conferences almost invariably begin with only one question: what is your field? This may be followed by other questions concerning nationality, university affiliation, academic rank, or publications. If those answers are satisfactory, the conversation may proceed to other levels of identity, such as hobbies, sports, children, tastes in music or in liquor. If the conference is long enough, lucky conferees may even learn a bit about the sexual needs of some of their colleagues. But the primary question, from which all else follows, generally remains the same: what is your academic field? Specialists regard their knowledge as if it were a feature of their bodies or personalities conferring identity and status.

Northern Wales is an ideal place to discuss the traditional relationships among "fields." All around us are evidences of the manner in which farmers for centuries have established relationships among their fields: they have erected sturdy stone walls. If the field that is claimed is very large, or especially valuable, then it may also be necessary to erect a fortified castle, like the one down the road here at Harlech. I have been interested in the relationships between academic and agricultural fields for some time, and, in general, my conclusion is that farmers and professors have used their fields in many of the same ways: they have eliminated natural diversity and struggled to maintain artificial monocultures; they have excluded neighbors and weeds by building artificial barriers; and they have used their fields as if the fields were personal attributes which establish their identity in the world. All of this has been done, among farmers and professors, in the name of something called "service to humanity," for both farmers and professors like to assert that their work is nourishing to mankind.

The so-called "hard" sciences do not study mankind, but their practitioners act as if they know what is good for mankind. A scientist's motivation is often based upon untested assumptions about human needs and satisfactions, perhaps derived from his personal or family experiences, from his early education, or from popular views of what constitutes human welfare. These views are sometimes utilitarian, usually quite practical, and

The Welsh references in this Joseph Meeker article can be simply explained by noting that it was originally delivered in Harlech at last summer's conference of SISCON (the Science in a Social Context Project). Based in England, SISCON was formed to develop experimental materials for the teaching of social aspects of science. The group's 1975 conference will be held in Canada's Jasper National Park in late August.

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often rather shallow: people need relief from physical discomfort, satisfaction of their desires, convenience, wealth, and ease. The scientist who serves humanity seems to believe that his knowledge of the world should be employed to manipulate the world to serve such widely-felt needs.

Humanity, of course, shows appreciation for the scientist's efforts, and bolsters his personal identity with such good things as professorships, tenure, salary increases, awards, or maybe even a Nobel Prize. Everybody seems to win. Humanity's desires are satisfied through the efforts of scientists, and the scientists are rewarded by praise and status.

Such services to humanity, unfortunately, are often disservices to the world and to the overall well-being of mankind. Land and resources that are "developed" by scientific technology are usually destroyed in the process. Human tensions mount as human environments become more cluttered with mechanisms designed to make life easier. It begins to seem possible that the Chinese philosopher Chuang-Tzu may have been right when he observed, "He who develops mankind injures life."[1]

Everyone would probably agree that science has produced no greater servant to humanity than Louis Pasteur. Pasteur was deeply moved by the suffering caused by human disease, and he successfully devoted his scientific efforts to relieving that suffering. From his work has grown an elaborate scientific and medical technology and the science of bacteriology with its associated disciplines. The irony is that Louis Pasteur and his scientific heirs, seeking to reduce human suffering, have at the same time contributed to extremely rapid population growth within the past century or two. Large numbers of people who would never have lived to reach reproductive age in other times, now reproduce abundantly because of the work of Pasteur and his followers. One is moved to ask whether this man's contribution to relieve human suffering has, in the end, produced more human suffering than it has relieved? As Garrett Hardin has pointed out, more people suffer and die because of overpopulation today than from any other cause.[2]

Similar ironies are evident almost everywhere one looks within the scientific tradition of the past century or two. Those physicists who formulated the theories necessary for energy development and industrial growth have served humanity, but they have also influenced the rapid depletion of natural resources and have provided the world with levels of air, water and radiation pollution unknown in any previous period of history. Those scientists who have served humanity through agriculture have developed new crop strains, increased productivity, brought us the Green Revolution, and disrupted nearly every agricultural pattern of land use that had been developed empirically over the several thousand years of agricultural history preceding their influence. Scientists who developed an atomic bomb to end the suffering of World War II contributed generously to the psychological and political chaos of life in a nuclear era. Very few areas of scientific inquiry are free of damaging consequences which arise from their technological applications.

A recent issue of *Science* reports upon the causes of the drought which is now afflicting the Sahelian zone of Africa. Nicholas Wade points out that the Sahel has supported a stable population of native people for many thousands of years, but that it has been converted into a desert over the past few decades thanks largely to the influence of Western science. Traditional agricultural methods have been discouraged and the political intervention necessary to accomplish this has disrupted the traditional social structures of native peoples. The native Sahelians, before Western influence, used their land with "essential ecological rationality" which "made probably the best possible use of the land." Wade concludes with an ironic comment which makes my point: "Curiously, however, it has been the West's deliberate attempt to do good that seems to have caused the most harm." The article ends with the optimistic wish that "other Western development strategies, such as the Green Revolution, are, one might hope, more soundly based in ecological and social realities."[3] There is little evidence to affirm such hopes.

The good intentions of scientists over the past few centuries have produced far too many destructive and unacceptable results. We resemble the highly-skilled disciplinary Brahmans of the Indian fable who found the bones of a dead lion in the forest, and decided to apply their scientific scholarship by reconstructing it. One knew how to assemble the skeleton, another knew how to create the skin and flesh and blood, and the third said he could give it life. The fourth companion, who was not a scientist but merely a man of sense, objected, reminding the others that if you create a lion he will probably kill you. The scholars argued that their accomplishment would amount to a scientific breakthrough for all mankind, and would of course be good for their reputations. The man of sense prudently climbed a convenient tree. When the lion was brought to life, it rose up and ate the three scientists. The story concludes in verse:

Scholarship is less than sense;
Therefore seek intelligence:
Senseless scholars in their pride
Made a lion; then they died.[4]

The Brahmin scientists represent interdisciplinary cooperation as it is understood by many modern Western scientists: specialists contributing their expertise to accomplish a challenging joint project. Specialists, too, are men of sense, but their specialized training has taught them to avoid incorporating their good sense into their

1 Chuang-Tzu, *Basic Writings*. Translated by Burton Watson. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964) p. 120.

2 Hardin, Garrett, "Nobody Ever Dies of Overpopulation," *Science*, 12 February 1971, p. 527.

3 Wade, Nicholas, "Sahelian Drought: No Victory for Western Aid," *Science*, 19 July 1974, pp. 234-347.

4 Ryder, Arthur W., translator. *The Panchatantra* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956) pp. 442-444.

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science. They often lack the ability to take into account large contexts of meaning and feeling which are also part of the real world. Thus they fail to integrate the varied functions of their own minds. Genuine interdisciplinary thought is that which contemplates the complexity of things according to the complexity of the human mind.

The human mind is much larger than our academic disciplines. Evolutionary development of the human brain has provided for many capacities which our scientific knowledge and our educational traditions either ignore or suppress. Recent research into the structures of the human brain has examined the differential functions of its right and left hemispheres.[5] The right brain appears to operate principally according to "synthetic" functions. These include artistic symbols, most skills, and much of human emotional and social life. The right brain is imaginative, and metaphor seems to be one of its specialized activities. The right brain also responds to the environment as a totality. Its functions are highly developed among many "primitive" hunting/gathering peoples, and in other total people whose emotional life has been unsupressed by their social code or their education.

The left brain serves more analytic functions. This brain hemisphere specializes in the symbol-assisted logical thought which constitutes the bulk of modern scientific and humanistic education. The left brain's expertise is expressed through language, mathematics, and what is known as "knowledge" in the academic world. It is the seat of science and of other analytic processes of thought which employ scientific methods.

The two hemispheres of the brain, of course, do not operate separately. They are connected by the many millions of fibres which make up the *corpus callosum*, the interconnecting nerve network in the mid-brain. Right hemisphere and left hemisphere functions are intimately interdependent. Any separation of them, such as a surgical severing of the *corpus callosum*, produces abnormal, often pathological behavior.

Modern scientific education, even at its best, tries to influence only a tiny portion of the left brain's capacity. The sophisticated development of isolated mental functions is regarded as "depth" among monodisciplinary scholars. Such specialization is purchased at great price, for it excludes many powers which have developed during the evolution of the human brain, but which remain unconnected during the educational process. Right-brain functions appear to have suffered atrophy in many modern people, especially among those who have been best educated. Women, only recently granted the benefits of higher education, appear to have retained use of their right brains better than men, especially those men who have been subject to sophisticated disciplinary education. We may also have lost some of our inherent mental powers as we have encouraged the externalization of human emotions, through art and literature, through television, and through the many other extended ways in which humans are able to make and reproduce emotional experiences at a distance without personal involvement. The specialized knowledge which appears essential to so many modern educators must deliberately exclude whole large classes of understanding and feeling in order to concentrate upon disciplinary expertise.

A simple example can be seen in any introductory biology laboratory where students are asked to dissect a dead animal — say, a cat. Some biology students, when confronted with their first dead cat, can be expected to suffer severe emotional responses. They see an image of their own death in the dead animal before them. Inside the cat are organs, blood, and bodily structures that they know to resemble those of their own body. It is hard to avoid the feeling that the student somehow shares in the cat's life and in its death. Professors of biology, of course, know the solution to this problem: they must instruct their students in objectivity. That is, their students must learn that the cat is a *thing* that is useful for scientific learning, and they must be convinced that the death of the cat has no significance for their own life and death. That, of course, is untrue, but "objectivity" must be learned early in the process of education. Unless a student is able to separate himself from the object that he is studying and to overcome the empathy that he naturally feels for other living creatures, he will be unable to achieve the detachment necessary for successful scientific work. The student's emotional response to the cat is systematically discouraged and, in effect, prohibited in the interests of science. The synthetic functions of the right brain are not allowed to impede the analytic functions of the left brain. The biology laboratory thus often misrepresents reality.

The human mind is interdisciplinary even though laboratories generally are not. Educational compartmentalizations of human perception, thought, and experience are as artificial as farmer's fields. Such educational surgery upon the *corpus callosum* produces half-truths about the nature of the world, misuse of mental abilities, and mental imbalance. Nature, like the mind, is interdisciplinary, lacking those sharp separations typical of academic structures. The myopic mine-shaft mentality encouraged by universities is responsible for many ecological problems and for much of our mental discomfort. Genuine scientific and humanistic education should reflect our true knowledge of the world as we experience it through both sides of our brain.

The disciplinary specializations of modern university education are not "traditional" in any important sense. They are, in fact, departures from tradition, most of them invented within the past century. Specialization as a way of life has begun to seem maladaptive. Unless we can learn to apply the unitive functions that are present in our three-million-year-old brains to understand the com-

5 E.g., Orenstein, Robert, *The Psychology of Consciousness* (New York: Viking Press, 1972); R.W. Sperry, "The Great Cerebral Commisure," *Scientific American* (Jan. 1964) pp. 42-52; Michael S. Gazzaniga, "The Split Brain in Man," *Scientific American* (Aug. 1967) pp. 24-29.

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plex interrelationships which nature has evolved over much longer periods, then our prospects for the future are dim indeed.

Science has served humanity's self-indulgent whims during the honeymoon of the industrial era, but now a more stable relationship is needed if the marriage is to endure. Technological applications of scientific theories are increasingly suspect because of their often unforeseen and unacceptable consequences, and because many have discovered that they do not in fact improve human life or the natural environment in significant ways. Humanity's most valuable cultural achievements grew from societies that knew nothing about automobiles, petroleum by-products, electrical energy, nuclear reactors, bacteriology, or the many other sophisticated offspring of the mating between science and technology.

New admiration has arisen for ways of life that are free of technological science. Increasing numbers of people are studying and experimenting with Oriental and primitive religions, with the social lives of hunting/gathering peoples, with agricultural communes, with personal crafts, and with interpersonal relationships, all of which offer alternatives to the shallowness of technological society. This is not mere escapism, but an affirmative search for ways of living which satisfy the deep human needs which science has deliberately neglected.

Non-technological cultures, past or present, still need *science*. They must have accurate and detailed knowledge of natural things and processes. Carleton Coon has estimated that most successful Eskimo hunters have more precise and complete knowledge of the tundra environment than any professor with a Ph.D. in arctic biology.[6] The Sahelian natives may know better the ecology of arid lands than do agricultural experts trained in great European universities. When scientific knowledge is integrated with the total social, psychological, and cultural life of a people, it is able to serve real human needs and to adapt human life better to its natural environments.

The human mind needs vast and complex scientific knowledge of the world, but it also needs more than that. It needs challenge, perhaps even danger, as well as the security and convenience that technology offers. It needs those close social ties with other humans which come through love, family closeness, and friendship. It needs joy and it enjoys beauty. And it needs what is known as identity, or a sense of the self. Identity is acquired through both scientific and spiritual knowledge of the *otherness* of the world, and through understanding of the meaning of the self in relation to all that otherness.

And what does the world need from the human mind? Not much, it seems. All that is required of us or any other species is that we learn to adapt to our environmental circumstances. The reward for success is merely more life, and the penalty for failure is extinction. The human mind is our best means toward winning more life, providing we can get it all together. □

6 Coon, Carleton, *The Hunting People* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971) p. 389.

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ROY SCHEELE

HIVED

(A harvest home)
In a light fallen clear
of the one last leaf
lingering above them
(there, it throbs now
like the keeper's stings,
fretted with veins
and notched at the edges
like teeth on a coin)
stand the shut boxes.
A quick mausoleum
keeps house in them.
Dark is at home here.
Still, there are tokens
of that long drinking
at the sun's springs:
prized rags of honey,
the savor of every
last drop of sweetness
the earth had to spare,
apple bloom, clover,
mock orange and poppy,
the orchard drunk deeply
with hedgerow and field
as head over heels
the hive worked its will,
gathering the substance
of regeneration—
that miraculous coup
recounted by Vergil,
who saw a haired humming
rise from the carcass
of a foundering bull
and hang in the trees
like a cloud of grapes
(he may have been drinking
on that occasion
and helped himself
to those shapes)—
and now this last
of autumn daylight
blankly reflecting
on clapboard and shingle,
the newlaid woodpile
behind the shed,
and all outdoors
grown darkly luminous
as the honied dusk
in the jar.

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NEEDLE

THOMAS GLYNN

Richie is coming out of a long scream.

He's blind. He don't know what's happening.

He's a junkie. He puts a needle in his arm.

He shoot up anything. Now he shot something up and it put a big boil on his arm and he's screaming at that boil. It's ugly, that boil. It's big and yellow and white. It's like a golf ball. Richie is inside himself screaming at his golf ball.

Laura she has a smaller golf ball and she's screaming too because she and Richie they shot the same stuff into them. Nobody knows what it is. Speed or something. They don't know. Richie don't want to go to the hospital because they see him like that and put him on the island. He don't know who to go to. Laura she screaming too but she think's she could get a doctor to fix her but she don't want to take Richie because it's a bitch to take a blind junkie on the subway or bus or whatever because Richie he just moan and groan and stare funny with those little pig eyes that can't see anything and roll up in his head and he keep bobbing his head back and forth and then putting it side to side so he looks real funny. Now people they notice Laura too but with Richie it's too much so she's thinking of some way she can get past Richie and get down to the doctor.

Richie he hear real well and he's a maniac. He's only five feet tall and maybe ninety-nine pounds but he's a maniac and if he grabs your arm he won't let go. He won't really. He don't care. He can set his teeth and it's like trying to shake one of them desert rats or snakes off you. They just don't leave. So Laura, she tries to be quiet so she can sneak past Richie and get out. Richie he's holding on to his stick. He goes out with a stick and a bowl and should someone grab for the bowl he lets them have it with the stick. Wham. He's mean and fast for a blind junkie.

Richie he plays a musical instrument. Everybody should play a musical instrument. Richie he plays a flute or clarinet or anything long that you can blow into and do with your fingers. Richie he has a beard and lice. That's a scraggly beard. Not much hair. He's too busy twitching and shooting up to grow a beard. Laura she hates his beard. She hates Richie too. But Richie scores and she wants to score so she goes with Richie and they score.

Laura she looks like death. She got death eyes and black hair, oh so black. Big hard nose and big hard lips and nice breasts but bad legs so she covers them up with boots. Laura she drives men mad but she's bad for them. She's like junk. How she get by Richie? Maybe she could eat him up. He's such a little boy. She could eat him up. Laura she Jewish and Richie, what is Richie? He something. Maybe English or Scottish or Welsh or something. He a mongrel. Grew up in the alleys. Always blind. Laura comes from good parents. Her father is a Rabbi. So was his father. And so on. You can see that in her. She comes from good lines. But she's on junk lines now. All strung out on death. Going to waste all those good eggs in her body. Long black hair. Beautiful hair. Thick. Very thick. Like your finger. Richie he grab ahold

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THOMAS GLYNN lives in Brooklyn, and is a member of the Fiction Collective.

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of her hair and say come on Laura you come with me. She scream and shout and yell and hit Richie. If she's hitting him with something hard and he's bleeding then he might let go. He would sit down and bleed and cry and then Laura would be sorry and take off her boots and fix him up. Then she'd hate him again because he start whining like a baby when he want something, maybe a fix or some speed or a Hershey bar. He loves to drink Chocolate Syrup. Cocoa Marsh. Empty cans all around the apartment.

Laura gets out of bed. Richie don't hear her. She holds her boots in one hand. Long white boots. All plastic and shiny white. She has fat legs. Veins and fat. It's her own fault. Above her waist she's thin but below she's fat. She leans over on the edge of the bed. Richie is crying, maybe moaning, maybe screaming, maybe cursing. Richie should wash. He's dirty. You don't want to touch him because you're afraid you'll get his dirt. He's got strong bugs that might jump on you and get you looking like him. That would be bad. Laura she stands up. Richie he don't hear. Richie curling around like a little ball. Richie screaming. The ball curls around Richie and Richie curls around the ball. Richie's boil sits on his arm like a fat spider, sucking Richie. Richie's spider is swollen. It sucks and sucks, laughing at the pain it gives Richie. Laurie starts walking to the door and Richie goes into another scream. This one is farther inside himself only since Richie is blind he doesn't know where it's coming from or where it's going. It works its way inside his veins like a rusty corkscrew and Richie thinks this just might be it. He wants his boil to break but he has thick skin and so his boils never break but always drain into himself. They empty all their poison into him.

Laura is outside. She sits on the steps and puts on her boots. She has to pull hard to fit the boots over her fat legs. The boots tuck all the fat in making her legs look slimmer. She still has the needle in her pocket. It's the same needle she and Richie used. She should throw it out but if she does then she won't have any needle and it's hard to get needles. If she could get it cleaned that would be better. She could go over to a friend's house and clean the needle. Put it in boiling water. That's what you do to a dirty needle. She stands up and walks down the stairs. She can smell all kinds of things people did in these halls. She has on a black sweater and a black skirt and white boots. Laura looks good. But she can suck you in. She's got the death mouth. How she get that mouth? Not always that way. Not when she was growing up. Then she had a big fat momma who smelled of vinegar and held her between her breasts. Her father had a long black beard and he was the law. Laura was the only child they had.

Laura started down the street. She would see Solly. Solly was mad at her but he might have a fix. Solly thought she had turned him in and one night Solly and a friend came banging their way into the apartment only they wouldn't let him in so he climbed out on the roof and came in through the fire escape and started shouting and screaming and his friend had a long knife and the first thing they did was to pick up the small dog and throw him right through the window and then they started chasing everybody around the apartment. Richie wasn't home that night. Just Bill who Laura was sleeping with and so they chased Bill around and Laura ran downstairs to the first floor to get some help. There was a nice young couple who lived on the first floor and the man might help. She ran down screaming and pounded on the door and Solly and his friend chased Bill around the apartment and the friend stuck Bill in the chest with a knife and they ran down the stairs right behind Laura and Solly wanted to stick her too but they were afraid to stay around there too long so they just went out into the street.

Bill was bleeding and he crawled out onto the fire escape and crawled down to the next apartment and banged on the window but the man wouldn't let them in. He was frightened. He was a little old Jewish man and he was frightened of Bill. He saw Bill out late one night stealing something and he didn't like Bill. So Bill crawled back up the fire escape and into his apartment. The apartment was all empty and white and all the lights were on and even though no one was in it the energy was still bouncing around inside from what had just gone on. The room was filled with electricity and Bill wanted to get out of there. He was frightened of the room. So he crawled down the steps bleeding on each step and he met Laura outside the first floor apartment. They went inside and he stood around for a while and then sat down on the sofa and wrapped himself in a blanket until the police came.

Laura thought all this. But she would see Solly anyway. Solly once sold cars in Detroit and he had a good job in K.C. managing a hash house but now he was a junkie like Laura. He was a funny little guy. He was all oily. He looked like he'd slip off anything he sat down on. Laura thought Solly might help her. Solly liked to give fixes. He liked to do the works and tie people up and stick the needle into them. Solly's apartment was on a roof and Solly liked to drag a mattress out on the tar and sleep there. Laura don't like her boil. It's not that it's big like Richie's but it's fat and it bothers her every time she walks. Sometimes Laura thinks people are after her. She runs away from things. Most of the time she's OK. But sometimes she runs. Sometimes she steals babies.

Laura got to Solly's apartment and Solly let her in. Solly boiled her needle and they sat in the living room. Solly looked bad. He said he was getting a job in Sioux City. He said he was getting off junk. He said junk didn't do you no good. Laura nodded. Solly laughed. He said her needle was ready. She asked if it would hurt. Solly said yes.

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Laura started shaking. She kept looking around the room. She wanted Bill. She wanted to run away with a carpenter. She wanted to spend the rest of her life eating health food and living on the farm in the Catskills and watching the Chassidic Jews dance in the meadows. She wanted to do these things and she wanted to weave and she wanted to be a dancer and go to Israel and join a Kibbutzim. She wanted to lighten her legs. Her eyes darted around like wounded birds. She had beautiful eyes. Even though they were death eyes. She hoped Richie wouldn't find her here.

Solly came back from the kitchen. He had the needle and a hot towel. He said she had to put the towel on her arm. He said it would hurt. He put it on her arm. It was like hundreds of little boils. Laura's big black eyes began to swim. Solly wrapped the towel tight around her arm. He smiled. He picked up the needle. It was just like giving a fix but it wasn't. This was taking back what the fix gave. Solly had never seen what the fix gave. Now he would see. Inside the boil was what the fix gave. Solly jabbed the boil with the needle. Nothing happened. The boil was soft and bounced when the needle touched it. Laura screamed. She jerked her arm away. The needle caught in the boil. Solly pulled the needle out. What was inside the boil gushed out. First it was hard and yellow. Then it was soft and white. Solly squeezed the boil and more came out. It kept coming out. It was like Laura's whole body was pus. Solly squeezed and squeezed. Laura screamed. This was the part Solly liked. But there were other parts too.

Solly had a twelve year old brother who was a junkie. He was from Queens. Solly called him my Queens junkie. Solly had a doctor's bag. It had all kind of doctor instruments in it. Solly said he once was a doctor. He also said he once was a priest and a fireman. But Solly was too little to be a fireman. He could hardly carry himself down a ladder. Solly liked to lie. It was easy for him. Laura didn't like Solly but whenever she needed a fix Solly came through and whenever she needed money Solly told her where to shoplift and he fenced for her. Solly was a real friend. Laura met Solly through Richie. Richie was out begging one day when Solly came up. Solly was real nice to Richie. He bought him a bowl of soup and told him how to make some money and he told Richie he would fix him up with some good stuff. Not like the stuff he had been shooting up. He gave Richie some good stuff and Richie liked it and he kept going back to Solly and Solly would take him around places to beg. Solly knew where all the good places were. He fixed it so Richie could beg more and of course he saw that he got his share. He always said he got it from Richie one way or another. Sometimes Laura and Richie got tired of Solly and they used to go out together and score themselves but Solly would find out about it and get Big Brown after them. Big Brown was a hitter. Solly paid him to hit. Laura thought if she could kill Solly she could get off junk. But Solly was hard to kill. Lots of people had tried. Solly just slid past everything.

Now Laura was into her scream. It curled inside her like broken glass. Solly squeezed his oily fingers on Laura's arm and watched the rivers of pus run. Solly had a bow and arrow in his bedroom. He used to spear pigeons. Laura wondered if Solly had any money in the apartment. It wasn't good to steal from Solly. But she wanted money. If she could get money she could get out of here. She could go up to the Catskills and get off junk. She could get away from Solly and Richie. She could eat yogurt and meet rich Jews. She needed some money.

Solly had gum trouble from eating too many Crunch bars. If he caught you stealing he threw his gum medicine at you. It smelled like coal tar. It was thick and black and gummy. It stayed on you for months. Sometimes Solly tried to lie on top of Laura. But he always slid off. Or Laura threw him off. He was small and weak. Laura was heavier and stronger. Now everything was out but Solly kept squeezing. Laura screamed the windows open. She screamed the roof off. She screamed the door down. She screamed Solly off his chair. The old lady upstairs tapped the floor with her cane. She sprinkled pepper through the floorboards. Laura swore at Solly. Solly just smiled. He had old sweat wrinkles in his face. He was ugly and yellow and sweaty and he wasn't young any longer. His pants were dirty. He smelled. He got up and ate a Crunch bar. He asked Laura if she would like a fix. Only a good one this time he said. Not like the stuff you got before. Laura threw an ashtray at him. She wanted to be with the Chassidic Jews. She wanted yogurt and fresh meadows. She wanted health and sun. She wanted a fix.

Laura's eyes drooled. She told Solly she was sorry. She told him she'd get him a glass of hot water. Solly said he could fix her. He left the room.

Laura wanted to kill him. She wanted to wrap her legs around his neck and squeeze him to death. She wanted to eat his tongue. She wanted to burn his boils.

She played with her boots. Warm boots. Richie tried to hock them. Tried to hock her clothes. Tried to sell tickets to her bedroom. Laura wanted to suck him dry. He had a hole in his foot. She wanted to suck him out through that hole. Solly came back into the room.

He had the junk look in his eyes. A thousand sickly silly beetles. You could smell the sugar on his skin. Sweet Solly. Solly wouldn't do it right away. Even if you had the money. Even if you were in a hurry. There were reasons why he couldn't. There were lots of reasons. Biggest was because you wanted it. Solly dangled the tube.

Solly snickered. He ate a Crunch bar. He fed

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the pigeons at his window. Solly was an animal lover. Once he had a sheep living in his apartment. He fed the sheep spaghetti and sour cream. He loved that sheep. He made love to the sheep. Then he got the sheep all junked up. Then he got tired of the sheep. He killed the sheep and then he didn't know how to get the sheep out of his apartment so the sheep stayed in his apartment rotting on the bed. The putrefaction was immense. Brown bloated bugs swam in the sheep's body. Solly didn't know what to do. He watched the sheep turn colors. When the sheep got to the colors at the end Solly could pull off its legs. He took the sheep out piece by piece and put it in the garbage can. Solly loves meat.

Solly lies down on his bed and Laura watches him.

This will take an hour. He will play with the tube. He will take off his shoes. He will pick his nose. He will go to the bathroom to play with himself and come out again and eat a bowl of cornflakes.

Solly would taste the powder. Laura would watch him. Solly would touch it to the tip of his tongue. His tongue was all wet and glistening. It was pointed. He dipped it in the powder. The tongue was white, the tip white. Laura watched all this and thought of the time she sold cosmetics at Macy's and wore this very hard witch-like make-up and went around in boots and black all the time and was very hard on the queers that came to the counter for a little powder or rouge. She loved to tease them. She made the sweat stand out on their tiny little buttocks and made their drip dry shirts run.

Solly pretend to dust under his arms with the powder. He smile. His mouth look like a soft knife. He look like soft yellow. Everybody a friend of Solly he say.

There is a knock on the door and that knock is Richie.

Damn him Laura think. That junkie can smell shit a mile away. Richie was wearing a Hawaiian shirt and a pair of army fatigues and some shower slippers. His boil had broken open and there was a trail of dried liquid stuck on his arm. It looked like a misshapen sword. Richie look up with his head to one side and smiling with his little pig eyes. He can smell Solly and he know when Solly got shit.

Richie funny. He shaking. He got his bowl and his stick and he is knocking them together. He does that when he wants something. Solly says hello and Laura keeps quiet thinking he won't know she's here but Richie says hello Laura and she says hi back. Everybody waiting. Nobody saying nothing. Richie going back and forth on his heels with that little smile on his face and his eyes dancing up in his forehead. He is waiting to be served. He has time. He knows where Solly keeps the Crunch bars and he can munch on one and listen to Solly and Laura. Solly tells him there's not enough and Richie just smiles.

He knows there's enough.

There's oceans of it.

It's all over. All people got to do is to give him some.

That's all people got to understand. Give him some.

He tells Solly he stinks and to fix him up right away. Solly tells him that there is enough for two. A nice high for two. But not for three. Solly promises to get him some in an hour. He knows where he can get some. Richie laughs.

He tells Solly to go suck. He swings his stick and Solly jumps back and the stick just misses his nose. Richie laughs and tells Solly to get the stuff. He tells Solly he's going to smell it first so he doesn't switch on him. Richie wants them all out. He'll shoot it all up himself and then laugh at the rest of them. Even that damn bitch Laura. Pull her hair out and make her eat it.

Solly asks him if he has any money and Richie shows him what's in the bowl and Solly says that's not enough. Richie wants to put Solly in a tube and shoot him up.

Richie starts shaking and crumples up on the floor. Solly is worried. It's not like finding a dead sheep in your apartment. Solly thinks if he can give him a small enough fix to get him on his feet he can get Richie out of the apartment. He tells Laura she must wait.

Solly gets the works. He pours the powder and ties Richie's arm and heats the spoon over a candle and pours the stuff in the needle and sticks the needle in one of the few good spots Richie has left on his arm. Richie jumps up, the needle dangling in his arm. He is shouting like a baboon. He takes the needle and starts jabbing wildly with it. Solly jumps back but not fast enough. The needle jabs in his arm and then comes out and then back in his arm again and then out and then in his chest and then out and Solly starts screaming in a funny little high-pitched voice and he tries to grab the needle from Richie and he does and jabs Richie trying to put it in his eyes and missing but sticking it in his cheeks and Richie screams and the needle makes little puncture sounds going through his cheeks and he grabs wildly for the needle which is now bent and has bits of flesh and blood stuck to it but he can't get the needle from Solly just the arm that Solly is holding the needle with so he reaches out and finds a bottle and breaks it and grinds it into Solly's face and Solly wrenches his arm away from Richie and screaming all the time keeps sticking him with the needle only this time doing it through the arm and shoulder and stomach and Richie is going mad moving Solly's mouth all over his face and shredding his cheeks and eyebrows and working over his nose until it looks like a piece of freshly chopped veal.

Laura decides to leave.

She hopes no one will notice. □

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STEVE ORLEN

THE STAR BOARDER

When I enter the room
she is clutching a half-peeled onion.
I'm never sure where to sit. She says,
"You're only the star boarder,
why would I tell you all this?"

She kneels on the worn linoleum,
an old Jew with knots in her legs,
scraping crumbs into a dustpan;
her head seems floppy and loose.
She complains about her husband,
long dead, and the boarders
who make dirty noises at night.
"If I tell them off at once,
the emotions come out uncontrolled.
I don't want to be sorry or wrong."

I sit at the table. She speaks,
sometimes to me, sometimes the floor.
"If I tell them *I hate you*
it might not be true. You can't
unsay things, like a salesman, can you?"
Even her skin is mottled, like an egg.
She makes me want to swallow my tongue.
She slaps me on the back, and frowns—
"I sure like having you around"—
and turns away. The toast is burnt.
I'm only the star boarder,
with no rights or fixed conditions.

I tell her, "Look, sometimes you
make me sick, that's the truth."
But she turns on the tv, the ballgame.
"Maybe I'll just spit and ignore you.
You could turn me into an egg
with your thoughts, Mr. Wise Guy."
Then she smiles, for politeness.
Her body is a bundle of unfinished business.

Later she whispers, from her depths,
"Why doesn't the boy just say what he means,
instead of all these flirtations,
balloons full of promises?
Here I am, an old lady, asleep."

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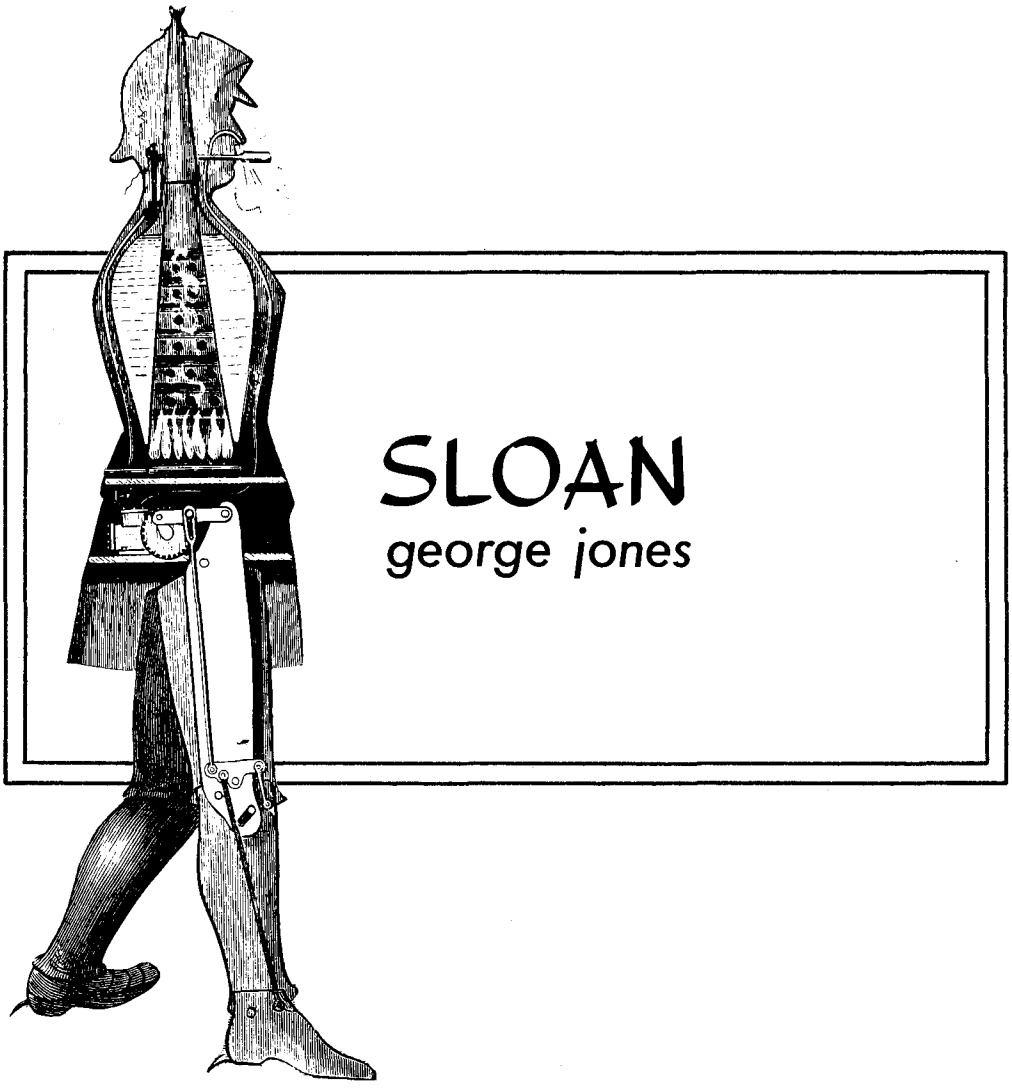

SLOAN

george jones

It was October, over half-way home, the days would be going down, a hundred fifty and counting—that much was good. But though the days were passing quickly, the future held no promise. He was suspended like everyone else in that half-light, that thin grey line between time and eternity where shadows prevail and not even death is certain; he was walking in the thin ground of being like no man's land. Time was floating, there seemed no distance between weeks and days, only a change of light. Waking or sleeping he was always in that land, it seemed to him. The troop was changing, old timers were leaving and new bodies taking their place—they would have to learn to work together again, it was always changing. The troop would be tight for a while, everybody knew what to do when any obstacle came up. It was a secure feeling then, you knew the guy next to you had it covered and you could count on him. It didn't seem so bad then. Perhaps you didn't feel so alone or reminded of your complete helplessness. These small illusions of stability and strength were necessary; it personalized things; time went fast.

But things were changing: half the troop was new and half were seven months, years, centuries old. The last week was fearful. They had hit two mines and been mortared twice. Now they were moving into a bombing zone, an unknown region called the Iron Triangle, where B-52s would come to empty whatever load they had after finishing a mission. He didn't like it; the land looked deserted and evil, inhabited by ghosts. There were barren wiry bushes four and five feet high as far as you could see, and few spaces to go around them. To top it off, tomorrow they would be working with RVNs. Sloan was not looking forward to that at all. Many of them were friendly souls but you couldn't depend on them when the shit started flying. They didn't want to be out there any more than anyone else. They weren't interested in taking chances. The war had been going on a long time, they had grown up with it, there was no hurry, why should *they* die?

Not only that, but their friendliness was often a pose. You couldn't tell by looking at them what went on behind their smiles—whether they were going to work with you or set you up for an ambush. No sir, he was not looking forward to tomorrow at all; he wished it wouldn't come.

Sloan was sitting in the back of 7-1 watching the

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dim figure approach out of the thickening darkness holding his arms up to his chest, one hand supporting the other. It was Halverson, the new driver for 3-2. He was a little pale.

"What have we here? How'd you manage that?"

"Mashed it with a hammer trying to change a track."

"It looks all right; a little peroxide and some bacitracin should take care of it. Lucky you didn't break it."

"It doesn't hurt too much but I thought I should come over."

"Well, it's easy to get infection here. You keep this bandage on and we'll have another look at it tomorrow. Are you all right?

"Yeah, I'm okay"

"Any letters yet?"

"No."

"How long have you been here?"

"About three weeks."

"Sometimes letters get hung up in base camp beause the mail clerk can't find which troop you were sent to. Maybe tomorrow."

"I hope so. You ever been here before?"

"No, I wish I wasn't here now."

"This place is kind of eerie."

"Nobody's been here in three years, I guess."

"I suppose I better get back and finish pounding that bolt. Thanks, doc."

"It's okay; come back tomorrow now."

Sloan watched him slip back into the night. He was all right, that Halverson, quiet and steady. He was all right.

By 9 a.m. the RVNs were mounted and two platoons were pulling out. It was a clear day and by 11 the heat had become so intense they had to stop for a break. Two RVNs had passed out from heat exhaustion already and the brush was so thick that it was nearly impassable, forcing the troop to change direction and pass through crater areas. When they pulled out again, single file as usual, they were headed for a deep woodline through which they would dismount the RVNs again and make a sweep of the area.

They had just entered a flat open area when they heard the thud. Sloan was already out of formation and headed for the track when Bob's voice came over the headset, "Okay, Tim, let's move it." One body was just coming back to the ground when they first looked. He had been thrown thirty feet up first. Another gunner was rolling and doubled on the ground. They stopped along the driver's side. It would be him that needed them most. Bob reached the track first and moaned, turning back as Sloan climbed up: "Jesus." Sloan looked down the hatch into the soft white cavity before he realized he was looking inside Halverson's head. He was turning from the charred legs and elbows and that gaping and incredulous opening through which life had fled —been forced instantaneously, like a rocket into eternity —when he saw lying on the trim vane Halverson's brain. Things were going black then and he was heaving as he ran back to 7-1; Bob was yelling at him to get back there. He grabbed a stretcher and came back, and they dragged Halverson out and covered him in a blanket—with his head empty, eyes blue and staring at nothing any more like he was astonished, his mouth open. They put his brain beside him and lifted him down. A chopper was coming.

They had found more mines now; Bob was standing in front of 7-1 with Gennetti, the demolition expert. They were dismantling another mine, a double one with an RPG shell on top and a mortar round beneath it. Sloan felt his stomach squeeze again and the blackness come back but he kept walking toward them. The mine was a foot in front of 7-1 on the driver's side, Gennetti was shaking his head. "Boy, doc, you gotta be a lucky cat. There wouldn't have been anything left of you." Sloan climbed in the hatch and backed twenty yards down his previous tracks. He shut the motor off and sat looking out the periscope windows, the sun burning on top of his head. The chopper came in and they loaded Halverson and the two gunners and sat in groups waiting to find out where they were going next. The Captain was on the radio, talking to headquarters. The troop was down; Halverson had been a quiet kid, he didn't deserve to die like that, it just didn't seem right.

They didn't want to believe it, they didn't want to have to. Only they did, and it changed them all. Sure, they pressed it away somewhere in the deep lightless part of their minds and never talked about it, but it was there, seeping into their dreams and thoughts, lurking in every bush or tree, even the helpless ground. Instead, they would mutter about how they hated the fucking army, the chow, the sergeants, the lieutenants, the orders, the missions. FTA, *fuck the army*, they would write it on their helmets, clothing, towels, anything. It was a way of releasing tension. But nobody said anything now. They waited, each in his own distant body, their separate cells, equally powerless, trapped, alone.

They were always waiting, hanging suspended between time and eternity, neither among the dead or the living (if you can call it living), but waiting until they were called forth from the limitless grey into the light. There were only two ways of leaving that state, both ways on a plane, and they never knew how it would be. The one a freedom to escape a few moments longer, to tally and raise hell in the warm light, the other a filing, shelving and arriving (perhaps too soon, always too soon), and of the two the last was more real.

The time between was fate. To come back alive no longer seemed a miracle, or providential, it was only a diversion. Yet they clung to that dream of freedom (that slim silver flight), in the hope of leaving this nightmare unscathed. One counted the days knowing

GEORGE JONES is a student at Northern Iowa, writes poems as well as fiction, plans to finish a novel.

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that even that act was fragile, that the name, the day, might already be written for the sacrifice when the dark fingers of fate would pull him from the abysmal grey deeper into the darkness. So, they waited. They gradually learned to live with it, look at it (no, never accept it), in small pieces, and even that was too much. They waited, Sloan thinking now, telling himself he ought to try to eat something since they might leave on a forced march somewhere, driving for hours without stopping. He reached into the C-rations box and pulled out a can, opening it without looking to see what it was. It was corned beef, and as he brought the fork to his mouth it turned into stringy flesh and the light started getting black again. He hurled the can out of the driver's hatch, wiping the juices on his stained fatigues, and sat there looking at his feet, squeezing his head between his forearms. He sat that way staring at the tips of his boots until he heard Bob climbing into the turret.

"Pick up the tailgate, Tim, we're pulling out."

"Where to?"

"Somewhere west of Saigon, I think."

"That sounds okay to me."

"Yeah, anywhere away from here. This place is a graveyard."

They plowed single file for the next five hours, through traffic, on roads hardly wide enough for two vehicles to meet; through civilians in their three wheel motor carts, swerving to get out of the way; thundering like a herd of steel buffalo wild and on the loose, everybody scrambling to get out of the way. And when there wasn't room the little carts would go shooting into the ditch with the long loaves of bread flying or Coke or whatever they happened to be selling. And the little people would climb out (if they could) shaking their fists, their mouths moving, teeth showing.

It was always like that, madness, complete and unfaltering, pushing everything out of the way, even running over people and not stopping—it had happened before. They didn't hit anyone this time, though, and when they did stop, it was hilly and open with discontinuous woodlines and flat dry ground occasionally cut off by dikes. They would stand down now for several hours, to eat and maintenance the vehicles; that was the word.

Tennessee, the driver from headquarters track, had come over to 7-1 and was looking at the track. "Hell, doc, you're gonna have to replace some of those pads; they're getting pretty chewed up." They were still working on it when the rest of the troop moved out. That was near midnight, so they decided to wait then until morning—not to try to finish pounding the footlong bolts through the links, let alone to screw a nut on after mashing the threads like that.

There were only three tracks left behind: 7-1, headquarters, and maintenance—plus the mess truck. Thomas, one of the captain's radio men, had come over to 7-1, and Sloan and he were sitting in the dark together while the radio cracked on and off, the captain directing the troop from the 3rd platoon out in darkness. Bob had gone with the captain.

"Why's he in such a hurry to move out?"

"I guess they spotted VC near a village a couple of clicks from here."

"Oh, and he wants to sweep in and catch them, does he?"

"Yeah, he's coming up for promotion; he wants to look good."

"Oh yeah, oh yeah. A few more points on the scoreboard, another successful mission. How about Halverson?"

"That was just a training mission for this."

"Halverson? A training mission?"

Then the radio broke in again . . . .

"We need a medic here; 1-4 just went down a ravine."

Then Bob's voice came over . . .

"We're going to need a chopper. I think the TC might have a broken back and the driver lost a couple of teeth."

It was quiet again. Things were starting to get weird. The second and third platoon had moved ahead while the first platoon recovered their men. Apparently a sister troop operating in the area had made contact and requested support.

The radio came on . . .

"Take that woodline, that's where it's coming from."

Then:

"Jesus!—2-5 hit a mine and blew over backwards, get someone over here!"

And:

"Christ, they're at 2-5; little doc's caught under it and they can't get him out."

They heard it all in darkness. Thomas had moved over by the radio, Sloan still sat in the fold-down lawn chair by the back of the track. 2-2 had hit a mine and one of the sister tracks had also hit one. They were still getting sniper fire. Out there somewhere it was happening. Tomorrow they would have to go. It was so far away, only the voice to tell him it was real, butting into the darkness and making an impression on the mind, then going quiet. Somewhere out there. He knew those people it talked about. The dark voice said it was real. Tomorrow would prove it. He didn't want to know. He had found out enough, seen enough already. There was a limit. Tomorrow? Who needs tomorrow? He wanted to sleep for a long time, maybe forever, just curl up and dream without ever waking.

But he was sitting in the turret when dawn came, scanning the horizon into which they would creep like frightened armadillos in a few hours. God, this country was almost beautiful at dawn when everything was still except light, and the air cool and moist, almost fresh. But the day. The day always came so soon and now they were moving in the tracks left last night and he

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didn't like this one bit, not at all. He was driving in front, leading the other vehicles. This was new; every inch began to threaten and he wondered if this was fate and he was going to blow up any second. His hands were shaking on the sticks and he felt like he was driving on explosive ice, trying carefully to follow in the tracks of others. But now the tracks turned away and they had to cross open territory. He was squeezing the sticks tightly and trying not to think. The troop was visible far off to his right front but there was all this unknown shifting surface between them. He could hang on and watch, hope as they slid closer, that was all. How could anybody do this? Nearly every day? It was like driving a nitroglycerine truck through an obstacle course and hoping your credit was good. God, he didn't know how they did it.

When they finally pulled into the perimeter he let out a sigh that had to be the longest one of his life. He was never going to do anything like that again; that was crazy. He positioned 7-1 near the center of the perimeter and had dropped the tailgate and was greasing the track when he heard the news.

This time it was going to be a dismounted patrol, another big master-minded operation, there would be a briefing on it tonight. Christ, he wondered how many more of these glorious missions he would have to go on. They were always coming up with some scheme to conquer the wilderness and make the roadways and villages safe. He could see it: supermarkets, factories, four lane highways descending on the paddies. "Gonna make this place fit to live in." "Yes sir." How many more? Well, at least Bob wouldn't be going on this one; he's getting too short. He can argue all he wants but he's not setting a foot outside the perimeter, not with 46 days left. Not this time. "Oh, to be in Finland." There was time now to clean the track. Second and third platoon were on their way back to the perimeter. He was going to get it done before chow so he could spend a few hours reading Salinger and writing letters. Now the night would come soon enough. You can talk in the dark, and he had even read with hands cupped over a flashlight in the driver's seat, but beyond that is only the watch and the searching of shadows. To hell with this mission; tonight he was going to sleep as though it wasn't going to happen.

It was 3 a.m. in the thick darkness; they were moving out single file, twenty-five on foot, toward a suspected VC village. He'd heard it all before, how they were going to hump their gear and bust their ass for a couple of hours in order to get a superior position, then sweep in and interrogate the people, search the houses, maybe catch a few VC off guard. It was to be a grand affair, a big show, we'll send you in choppers so you won't have to walk back in the heat of the day, and fresh water too. Everything was going to go smoothly—yeah, that shit was familiar. He didn't believe it, any of it. They were always getting pep talks; the colonel would fly in and everyone would have to stand at ease in formation in the middle of the jungle while the descendant of the great Tanker would try to equal his dad: "Why, if Charlie knew what we're going to do to him tomorrow night he'd be waving white flags all over the place." And they would listen with an annoyed patience as he walked up and down in front of them waving and yelling, laughing and stopping to look them in the eye with that mean sparkle in his, as though they were supposed to growl and grin and shake their fists.

So when the captain told them to move into position and called by accident "Sloan", because he was nearest to him and then realizing who it was said, "Oh, you, you're nothing; move over there," he was thinking: *it really is possible to hate someone*, to feel that bitter surge of acidic fluid rise and burn in his chest about to explode. If he could kill anybody, it would be him.

It is beginning to get light. We are crouched in a grove off the road near the edge of the village. Someone is approaching on a bicycle; he stops when we come out. He looks nervous, the interpreter is barking questions, then he hits him on the jaw, and again. He has no identification, but he has documents; he is a tax collector for the VC. He is getting up slowly from the ground now, holding his stomach and rubbing his jaw on his shoulder. We are moving into the village now on both sides of the road. No one is awake yet but we are headed toward a shack; it belongs to the head of the village. They drag him out of bed into the early morning light. The interpreter is spitting words all over the place now and waving his arms and pointing at the VC. We are heading toward another shack. Two men go in and a thick-bodied woman is dragged out. The interpreter is pacing up and down in front of her now and his eyes are getting wild and his words come out in short invective bursts like he was spitting bullets at her. He's slapping her now and she's crying, retracting, four arms holding her. Now he's got a gas can out of the shack and look! Jesus Christ, he's pouring gasoline in her mouth, she gasping and spitting and he slapping her the whole time. Sloan's stomach is beginning to churn. She's really crying now but she's saying something, half-moaning and choking and now we're stomping like madmen over to another shack while the light is jumping back and forth, and dragging out rice and medical supplies and guns and ammo. The captain is on the radio now with that grotesque smile, talking big, looking so in control, his chin jutting out into the air like a face on a national monument in South Dakota somewhere. And they're looking it all over now, this whole damn village, everybody running around like they have a mission to perform, acting big and important. And when it's over the whirling ship will take us back to our steel stronghold, the impregnable circle, that iron hand of God thundering through the jungle to stamp out evil. We will just fly out of here like Sky King, sure. The sonofabitches.

It goes on like this throughout the morning, shack to shack, tall green men emerging victorious, their hands

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full. Some going off into the bushes with a Mama-san, all guzzling water like gin and laughing, the end of a glorious mission. Oh yes, it seemed to be going well, you know, white flags hanging out of eyes, big hard-assed smiles. It was a big deal, a gala affair. Some actually believed it was, slipped right into that role of thinking. But then they found out. Only two choppers were coming, and of those, one for the prisoners. That means most of us are walking back with no water through open rice dikes in the middle of the day. They forgot; they'd heard it before.

It always happened that way. There was always that pitch and slogan to build you up and get you ready to move out. Think of the benefits. Yes, he'd heard it before. And they were tramping now, had been for an hour at least, dragging their feet across dikes and paddies in soil that easily turned to dust under their feet. The sun was boring holes in their helmets, their backs. The day was on fire, and their bodies began to swell from the heat. He had begun to expect something before they made it back when the radio man fell in front of him all scarlet and heaving. He dropped to his knees beside him throwing down the glorious stretcher he had been forced to carry. Pritchard was moaning and half conscious from heat exhaustion and he was turning colors now. Sloan grabbed a canteen and poured part of what remained over Pritchard's head, then he started unbuttoning his clothing. Pritchard was babbling and Sloan began to slap his face and then his arms and legs, giving him a swallow of salt water now and trying to shade him as much as possible. Then another man went down (this time black) and he had to run to him, shouting instructions behind him and hoping the chopper was coming. He found the smelling salts this time and the second man was coming around when the chopper came.

It was like they were on a tiny island in the sun, aloof and forlorn, forced adrift and doomed before they started not to finish. They were all standing marooned watching the chopper from the shores of that desolate island as it shook the dust, whirling before them, and set down, some of them running hunched over like helpless fools with the tiny white and black bodies on huge drab cookie sheets toward familiar distant blank faces that pulled the baked men in and lifted off without a word—and they standing, watching it go like some pregnant grasshopper of death further and further into the blazing sky until it looked like a fly, just a speck on their eye. And then they could see it no more and the captain was calling for another one of those whirling bugs to bring water and carry us back because we can't get any further than this island, and they were saying there weren't any bugs to come get us. And the captain was calling our troop for tracks to come get us at so many degrees west and in what sector of the little squares on his map.

So we think we're breathing easy now, sitting in the semi-grassy dust near a pineapple tree and waiting for the three to come, but then we hear it, and the radio comes on and Sloan is hearing what the captain hears and not believing — it was 7-1; Bob was driving — holding his head and seeing black and hearing that ringing increase until he can hardly sit, can hardly keep from running over and kicking his face, his balls, screaming: *God almighty, you fucking sonofabitch you fucking sonofa*—while he's squeezing his windpipe so tight that his head is turning blue. But really he's sitting there, his knees hunched up toward his chest, leaning on them and staring quite cold and hard and beginning to rock and weave now, hearing his throat gasp while his mind is shouting: *I won't I won't I can't*, and his hands keep trying to get up, keep moving in that direction, he holding them in, and the radio comes on again and he's snapping this time, his eyes squeezed tight against his knees and his hands wrapped under, locked and pulling hard against each other so that his fingers are turning white. Closing his eyes he sees 7-1 smoking, the turret gone and Morgan lying on his side screaming then stopping (the shrapnel burning in his back in spasm), then screaming again while they put out the fire and pull Bob (his arm and legs and eyes gone) charred and smouldering out of the driver's hatch. Then another explosion and the radio comes on again . . . "the engine exploded and blew hot oil on five of the men who were trying to get the ammo out before it exploded." So then it burns again, this time exploding with sporadic bursts like a cobra spitting bullets, like a huge arsenal of firecrackers—only it isn't July, it's October with 46 days to go, and then this mission, this great and glorious grand scheme cooked up by stir-crazed eagles and sent down for men to prove it wrong.

The bugs were coming now; yes, now they were finally coming, only too late for promises. It didn't matter now, they all knew, should have known what to expect from those scheming words, promises. Someday, maybe they would revolt. Some day. Two VC captured and a few bags of rice, some weapons, a few papers confiscated and look, at what small cost! Two men with heat exhaustion, two men hit a mine (one dies), five men injured (one over most of his body, a family man, twenty-four years sergeant, he dies) from oil burns. A small price to pay for such a large gain. He wondered if the captain would mark that on his scoreboard that he kept in his tent.

They were lifting off now and as the dragonflies moved up he could see that long column of smoke rising up off the metal hulk that used to be 7-1. He stared at it, at the tracks that were moving away now toward the iron circle of the camp like leaden elephants. It was beginning to turn grey, all of it. The ground was coming up on them fast now and he jumped out of the ugly bug and walked into camp with the rest of the men. It all looked so different he almost didn't know where he was, who he was. 7-1 was out smoking by some tree line. He stood with his aid bags and blanket liner looking at the empty slot it used to occupy. There was no place to go. □

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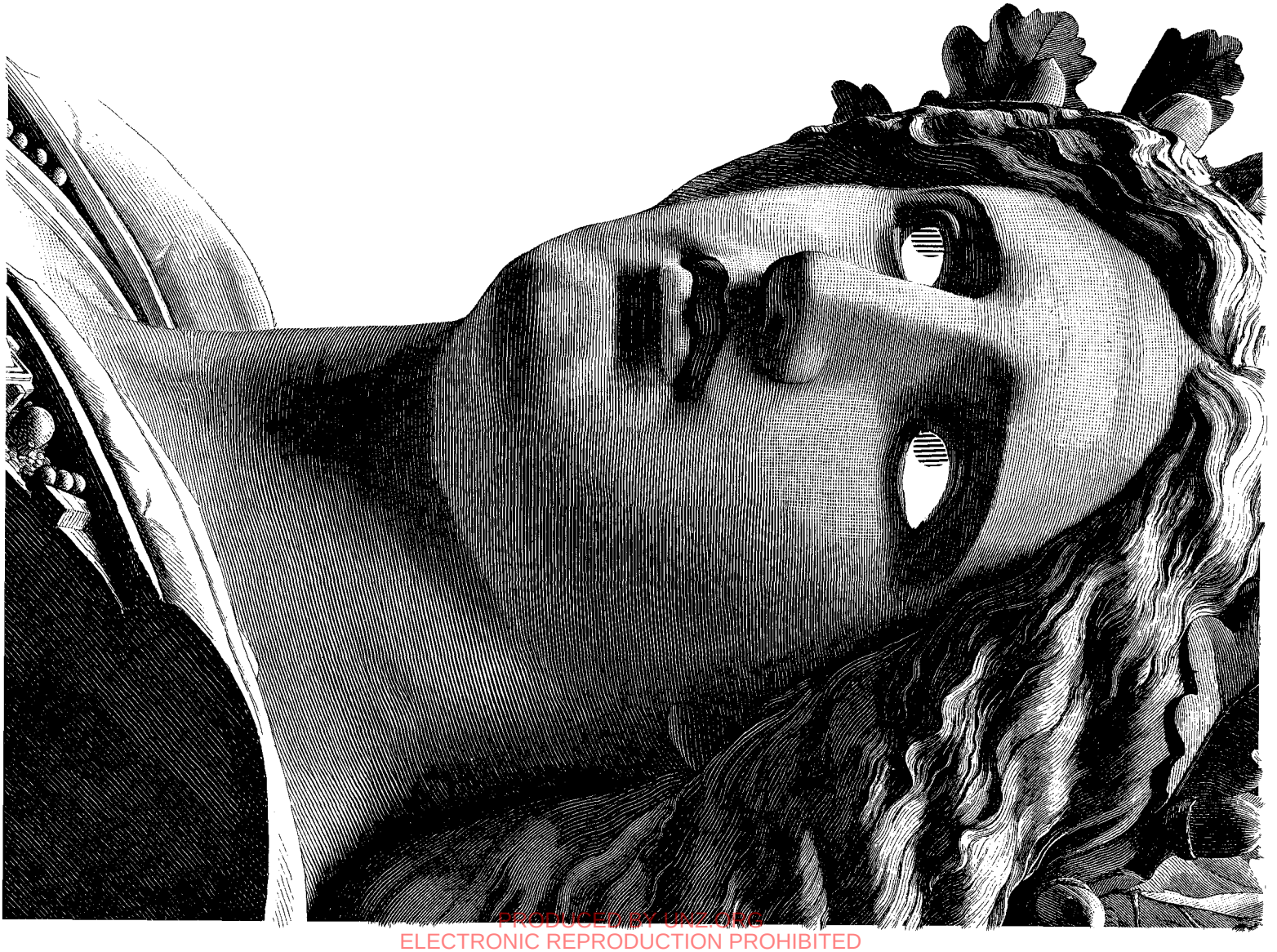
the great american love story eleven fictions



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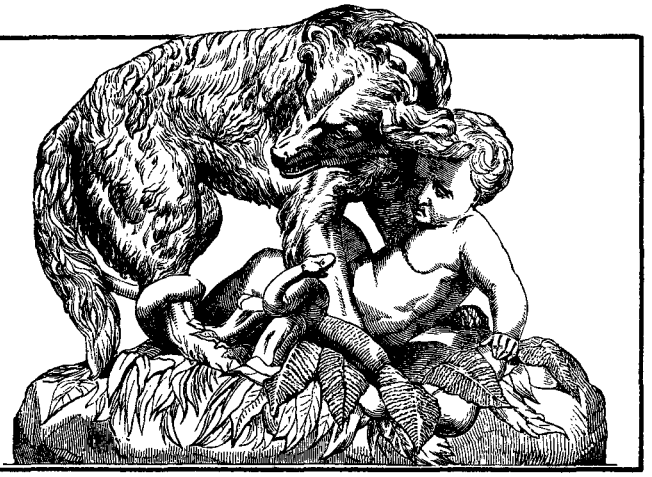
MOTHER

by Wolf Hill



All of us little ones were naked. There were six of us in her boat. Allen stood in the bow and played his flute at the birds. That was Allen's way. Mother didn't say anything about it, either. Jeffery stood behind Allen and held up a great white ball as best he could. The ball was really too big for Jeffery, and Mama had to keep tapping the damn thing up with her foot, so Jeffery could pretend he was a big deal. Big Deal. I hate that kind of thing.

Morris kept whining for Mama to hold him, but she only hugged him from time to time. It was me she held. I covered my ears with her dress folds and hid from the wind and the water and the monsters of the deep.

Todd was smart-assing it up and swimming in the water, alongside the boat. He never went out too far, I noticed. I hate Todd. He kept yelling, "Mama, look at me; look at me!" The little creep. I pressed closer to Mama and tangled my fingers in her belt, in case she considered letting Morris into her lap after all.

Janeen, my sister, swam around our boat, too. She's not so bad. I don't actually hate her at all, though she seems to be Mama's favorite at times. Janeen was Mama's first one, and so you have to expect that sort of thing. Besides, she's only a girl. Janeen was practicing her lines for the school play coming up:

"In fourteen hundred and ninety-two,

Columbus sailed the ocean blue," she rhymed, followed by some more stuff about appearing and disappearing. She had the part of the Good Fairy Squirrel. I had wanted that part, but knew in my heart I couldn't possibly have learned all the lines. I don't know how she did it. Janeen acted like it was nothing to be able to recite so many words by heart.

Bang! Janeen vanished! Whish! She re-appeared about four feet in the air above Jeffery's ball. Whoosh! There she went again. The Good Fairy Squirrel all right. I dug against Mama's belly and shut my eyes. It scared me, when Janeen did magic.

We were passing the low gray hills of Doran. Probably, we'd make it to Father's house before another hour had passed. I sighed heavily. Mama and I had talked about it last night. I had wept and said, "What if Father doesn't like me?" And Mama had said it didn't matter at all, whether he did or didn't. "What if he beats me?" I cried. Mama had smiled and said he wouldn't dare. Hadn't Mama killed the Dragon of Belladore just last spring? But I needed to be reassured many, many times.

How gorgeous it had been! Mama had come striding in from the field, streaming with dragon's blood and rattling the beast's hacked-out teeth in her sewing basket. She had laughed loud and danced late that night with several young men. When I found my way into her huge warm bed the next morning, she'd smelled of No-No Drink and sweet smoke. I thought I could smell a strange man in the bed, but after kicking and giggling all over it, I discovered no one there but me and her. I get into Mama's bed every morning.

I played with a dragon's molar which Mama had hung on my neck chain and tried to think ahead. It wouldn't be just my Father to worry about. There were the other relation, too. I'd met a couple of them before, but only slightly recalled Great Aunt Alicia's hairy mole on the left side of her chin, and Uncle Frank was just a thin man's name now. This day would not be easy.

I had read everything I could lay my hands on about Fathers in general. But I only remembered the bad stuff. The Father who let his daughter and her lover freeze to death in poverty, because he didn't care for her choice. The Father who drank and beat his children. (I fervently hoped my Father didn't drink.) The Father who killed his own son with a shotgun blast through a screen door—he'd mistook the boy for a burglar. I prayed my Father wouldn't mistake me for a burglar.

"My poor little Lion. Look around you. It's a pretty day. Don't be afraid," Mama crooned. I loved it; my nickname, Lion. My real name was Ayunino, the Old One's word for lion, but the sound of Li–on rolled like a song from Mama's lips.

"Mama save me," I whispered over and over as she pet my hair.

WOLF HILL has just finished a novel, The Haywain. *He calls Arizona home, and doesn't care for biographies.*

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There had to be more than ten thousand people drifting over the water to the family reunion. They seemed to be enjoying the water and the trip. I like water, too; it is the wet, slippery things in the water that I hate. Janeen just flies up into the sky when a huge ugly sea thing comes after her, but I haven't learned that trick yet. And there's always the brown lizard of the mountains. It can fly, too. I can just picture myself suspended in mid-air above the slathering jaws of a sea creature, while overhead a snapping, screeching mountain lizard goes after my ears. Makes me feel sick in my stomach to think about it.

There were many rich men in the boats about us, with their dogs and kids running around them; all going to see my Father. Some of their wives had taken to mimicking Mama's hair-do. Lately, the women tried to be just like Mama in every way, sitting quietly most of the time, except for galas, and then they all laughed easily and danced fast, like Mother did. It had brought peace to our land.

Last year there had been no rain and few crops. The Eagle clan had grumbled and said some mean things in private about Mama. But word gets around. They get down on their bellies nowadays and thank the Heavens that Mama ignored their rudeness. They had seen what was left of the Dragon of Belladore.

It was as I feared. Father was a rich man. His house even had a porch. On the porch were the close, adult relation we'd come to visit. My Great Aunts: Bird, Oriele Sue, and Roxanne touched me intimately. Morris got excited and peed on the porch, and Father stepped barefoot into it, as he came forward from the small crowd to welcome us. Father cursed and gave Morris a kick that caused the loss of my brother's left front tooth. I smelled the No-No Drink on Father's breath. My Father must be a drunk. One of my worst fears had come true!

Father picked me up, looked me over, and started to throw me after Morris. Mama stopped him cold with one lifted, perfectly-tended eyebrow. Father said I looked skinny. Mama said I was just growing faster than my fat. Father asked why my hair was so light, nearly white, when theirs was raven black. Mama said all babies have light hair to start. Father asked how old I was exactly, and Mama started talking to Uncle Athal and Aunt Nell about the pleasant weather. Father got very quiet and didn't seem to have much fun the whole day.

I ate four times and threw up twice. Well, we had had a bad year, and Father evidently hadn't by the looks of the food tables. Food was on the floors even! Wherever I stood, there were goopy bowls of this or that. Aunt Roxanne made me eat some green gelatinous stuff that had cabbage slivers buried in it. That made me throw up the second time.

Uncle Frank did a filthy thing to me behind the stables, and I spent all afternoon alternately napping and worrying if I should tell Mama. After all, Uncle Frank lived here. He was my Father's brother. There would be trouble over it, and where did I fit in? It was difficult to figure out if I'd done something wrong, too. My stomach hurt.

That night, I whispered my painful secret to Mama, and she said she'd take care of it. Then she promised me a special trip to see Blind Glenda, who was famous throughout four countries. I felt Mama leave our bed in the night, but I was too much into sleep to protest. When she slipped back into bed later, I didn't even know it. The next morning, the men found pieces of Uncle Frank all over the house and grounds.

They collected all the Uncle Frank parts and started putting the body back together on the marble-top hall table. The men searched, and Father laughed nervously all morning. I heard Father say that Uncle Frank wasn't good for much anyway. As late as noon, men would run jubilantly to the table with a recovered finger or toe of Uncle Frank's. I wondered if he had deserved his punishment; since I couldn't actually remember the whole nasty event by the stables, it couldn't have been so important. They never found Uncle Frank's left elbow or his pee-pee.

Old Blind Glenda was dark and had hairy, twisted feet and legs. The strange old thing had a weird-looking ponytail hair-do that she'd somehow stiffened, so that the hairs would stand straight up from the top of her head. In addition, she had a white cloth tied over her eyes, and a bunch of long white ribbons fell from her headband. She held two jars of the No-No Drink, from each of which she sipped in turn.

We sat down on the riverbank (she lived on the bottom land; not a bad-looking house, either), and Blind Glenda proceeded to examine me. She felt my head bumps and said I would rise to the heavens themselves. She felt my hands and said I was clever. She felt my legs and declared my enemies would fall down before me. She rolled my pee-pee between her thin hands and said I would father twenty-three male children and forty-four females. Finally, she listened to my heart and said I would never die. Mother was quite pleased and gave Blind Glenda her best turquoise necklace.

Mama put me on her shoulders and carried me back across the river. On the road back, just near the leaning red rocks, I asked Mother about Uncle Frank. I couldn't stand the worry anymore. Had I done anything wrong? She said not. Did Uncle Frank deserve such a rough execution? Mother seemed puzzled for a bit. "Deserve it?" she laughed, "why he loved it!"

Suddenly, she stopped and opened her blouse, showing me her warm, pale breasts. It had been ages since I'd stopped nursing, but the old urge was still there. Mother asked me if she were starving, would I cut off my legs and feed them to her? I promised yes easily, and Mother grabbed me up into the air and held me close. I was so happy! I was not a bit afraid when we started to sink into the ground. As the earth settled over my head, Mother pressed me tightly and I waited to see what new thing she had in store for me. I wasn't scared, because I knew I was a good boy. □

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Stephen Minot

GRUBBING

Erik woke, sat up abruptly. The iron springs squealed under the weight of his bulk. From downstairs Sal's voice — the sound that had jolted him awake — continued:

"I said stop it now before . . . . Oh, *no*!" Then, her voice weary, "God, your father will be furious. Honestly, Michael, you must be psychotic."

Well, it was done. No use worrying — particularly on his day off. So Michael had gouged the kitchen table with his wood-block carving or broken a window or . . . No, it was something father-owned. Erik frowned, concentrating. Had he left his axe out? The chain saw? The possibilities were limitless. Michael, seven, was the dreamer, the reader. Only last Christmas he had been left to watch on the cookstove a batch of inkberry brew — a dye they used for decorations — and with his head in a book he had let it boil right down to a stinking scum. The house had smelled for a week.

With Michael it was always daydreaming carelessness. But with Timmy, two years younger, it was cheerful rebellion. Once Timmy had dismantled the family typewriter in less than an hour.

On such occasions Erik bellowed, spanked, roared protests, had everyone in tears. But he held no grudges. For the first time in his life he owned land, plenty of it, and that gave them room for error. No upstairs tenants to complain about the noise. Not even neighbors. This was a place where he and his family could work out their problems directly. For all the destruction that went on, their life there was far less damaging than the tight-lipped, dour, and oppressive world he had endured as a boy back in St. Louis.

He threw off the covers and shivered. It was April and still raw. Spring comes slowly in upstate Maine, and this was still the mud season. He swung his feet onto the floor, each one striking the cold boards like a slab of beef. The windows rattled.

From where he sat he could look down on the shingled woodshed roof still white with frost but now beginning to steam from the warmth of the sun. Beyond was the barn, swaybacked and wavesided in the swirls of old window-glass. He thought of all the calculations that had once gone into that barn — careful measurements to the inch, ridgepole made to match the horizon of the sea with a spirit level, uprights aimed directly at the center of the earth with a plumb bob; all that planning, yet it looked far better to him through this old glass, no two lines parallel or even straight.

His neighbors, country bred, probably wouldn't see it that way. But Erik's childhood had been straight-edged, straight-backed, with plumb lines drawn right to the heart of the lower middle class. He wanted no more of that. Neither he nor Sal wanted any more of that.

"He won't take you with him," Timmy was chanting to his older brother. "He won't take you. He won't take you."

"He will too."

"Won't!"

"Hush up, both of you. Try being quiet. Just try."

"We'll be quiet as . . . mice," Michael said, pleased with the simile.

"No," Timmy said. "Quiet as ghosts."

"There aren't any ghosts."

"There are."

"*Silence!*" And she was granted it.

But of course there were ghosts. For Erik that was a good part of the farm. The Skolfields, for example — distant relatives of Sal's. Generations of them had bred cattle in the barn where Erik now kept his Jeep and four Nubian goats. Skolfields had bred Skolfields on the creaking, squealing bed he slept in. And when they died, they didn't go far. Down behind the barn, just barely within view of that upstairs bedroom, was the family cemetery, stones half hidden in the untended grass. There

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STEPHEN MINOT is visiting writer at Johns Hopkins this year. His first story collection—including this piece —is called Crossings, *published by University of Illinois Press this month.*

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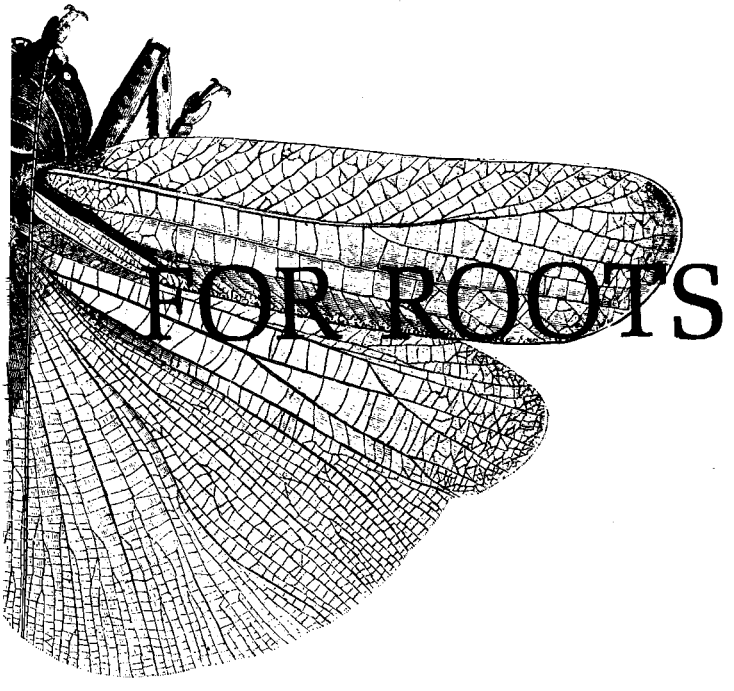

FOR ROOTS

were generations lying there, though he hadn't had time yet to sort them all out.

There had come a time when the cities began to seduce the survivors — Sal's branch moving south to Kittery. It was the same pull which had drawn Erik's family off the Missouri farm into St. Louis and the servitude of a retail business. The Maine farm went on the market and was eventually bought by a wealthy out-of-stater who was generally regarded as crazy. His goal in life was to save the arctic musk ox from extinction. Maine, apparently, had the right combination of fodder and isolation. They didn't mind the cold and they needed space for grazing. Some he brought down from the Aleutian Islands at great cost; others he wheedled from zoos where they were prone to be sickly and irascible. The neighbors, tolerant yet highly conservative in their husbandry, predicted disaster.

Erik had heard from them grim tales of bulls that gored their young and cows gone sterile. A pack of troubles, they said. But for all this the herd did grow. There was a time when those hillside pastures were dotted with the shaggy and foreign-looking beasts. The juniper bushes through which they wandered were adorned with long wisps of fur finer than cashmere.

So the experiment was a success. But no one cared, possibly because there was no real money in it. The story was that he needed more land and moved further north — to New Brunswick or perhaps Newfoundland.

As soon as the farm was on the market a second time, a distant cousin wrote Sal's aunt, wondering if someone in that great extended family would buy the place back. They had a high regard for continuity.

The decision to move to Maine was too big for them to have done it with logic and planning. Chance put the pieces together. As lovers they had shared an aching dislike for the college they were both attending and for the city in which it was located. Even in winter they would seek out deserted beaches along the Rhode Island coast and walk for miles, their silent pleasure a kind of communication.

For him, college was an entrapment. He had been lured there by parents who saw it as financial security; and when they told him how much they had sacrificed to keep him there, it was like locking the gate of a cage. How could he leave?

He could never tell them how he spent his hours in class imagining himself smashing every window in the room with his fist. Or that he had dreams of knocking down walls. The only person he could confess that to was Sal.

They both wanted to break out, but the escape route was unclear. Where would they go? Both of them had grandparents who had farmed, but everyone knew that you couldn't do that any more — not without making a business out of it. And neither Erik nor Sal was drawn to communes. So they remained in captivity and graduated with honors.

Freed, they stepped right into another trap. They tried teaching in an urban school. It was the Right Thing to be doing, but horrible. Then, in a single week, their apartment was robbed, they were served with an eviction notice from the Highway Department, and they received the news about the farm in Maine. Never mind that the place was without telephone, electricity, and running water; even without seeing it they had made the decision.

Voices drifted up again. They were arguing about boots. That meant breakfast was over and he had wasted more time than he should even for a Sunday. He planned to put in four hours at the boat yard that day, extra work to make up for the long, jobless winter.

"But there's no snow," Michael was saying.

"There's mud," she said. "The road is a veritable quagmire."

"What's 'veritable?' " That from Timmy.

"To you, kiddo, 'irresistible.' Now get those boots on."

"But they're so heavy," Michael said.

"Builds leg muscles."

"And make us strong?" As the youngest, Timmy was on a strength kick.

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"Incredibly strong."
"As strong as Daddy?"
"Almost."
"When I'm grown up . . ."
"Get that damn boot on."
"When I'm grown up . . ."
"The boot."
"But when I'm grown up will I be as big as Daddy?"
"At least. Hold still now, I'll do it."
"And I'll have a car. And be tall."
"Sure you will."
"And have a big wee-wee like . . ."
"Right. Now stamp on that boot."
"A giant has a wee-wee as big as my arm."
"There aren't any giants. Now the other boot."
"But if there were?"
"As big as your arm. At least."
"Wow! Hey Michael, did you hear that? Mom says . . ."
"Knock it off, kids. Get those damn boots zipped." Her voice was brusque. "O.K., out, both of you." The door slammed and there was silence. Erik grinned and began dressing.

When Erik came down the stairs, the house shook. He liked the sensation. When the boys were there, he would thunder out "Fee, Fi, Fo, Fum," one syllable for each step. But this time there was only Sal and he couldn't be sure what her mood would be. Three months pregnant, she was having a hard time with mornings.

And then too, there was the matter of his working weekends and evenings at the boat yard. She could see the sense of it — for the length of a bitter winter he had not worked more than two days a week. It was half a day here helping to plaster the church basement and a day there shoveling crap out of a four-story chicken barn. What few lobstermen went out didn't need help and the boat yard lay silent and unheated. Now at last he was offered work seven days a week if he could stand it, and he could damn well stand it. It would be two months before all the lobster boats and the few pleasure-craft were scraped, painted, and hauled out of that sagging, leaking old boathouse and launched. And for the rest of the summer he would be kept busy as hired hand on lobster boats and tending his goats and his garden.

Right now he had to earn some cash and she knew it. But she was also feeling dependent. He wasn't used to that.

As he came into the kitchen she was at the soapstone sink, scraping the breakfast dishes into the triangular slop-sieve and rinsing them, working the pump handle with an easy regularity, two dogs at her feet and a cat on the counter all waiting to be fed.

"Click!" he said. His two hands were raised, forming a rectangle with fingers and thumbs. "Country girl at pump. Pretty as a picture . . . ."

She turned around and he stopped grinning. Her face was white and there were circles under her eyes.

"You feel as bad as you look?"

She shrugged. "Planning to work today?"

"I was thinking of it."

"I figured you might."

Her tone was neutral, but there was something else hanging in the air. He couldn't quite place it.

"Have a bad night?"

"Good beginning," she said with a ghostly little smile. They had agreed to abstain during her first three months, but they hadn't been able to stick to it. "So now the stomach's acting up. Retribution."

"I can get my own eggs."

"Relax." She poured his coffee from the kettle which simmered at the back of the old wood-burning range. He sipped it while she put eggs in the frypan. The room was as quiet as it ever was — just the sound of the wood fire, the sizzle of hot fat in the pan, the scratching of a dog, the rustling of the guinea pigs in their cage next to the stove.

"Something's eating you," he said.

"Huh."

"Something's knotted up in t h e r e. What's the trouble?"

A weary little smile and then she lifted the egg off the hot iron, flipping it over. "Can't a girl have any privacy?"

"Like that blister?"

When they were in college they had taken a four-day hike in the wilds of Baxter State Park. She had come down from the peak of Mt. Katahdin without complaining about a blister which had already become infected. Later, she almost lost the toe.

"Erik, how about staying home today?"

He set his mug down hard. "Stay home? When I've been sitting on my butt all winter? Aren't you tired of looking at my ugly face day after day?"

He was grinning, but he didn't feel it. Did she think he went down there and froze his hands scraping and painting in an unheated boat yard just for fun?

She scraped the eggs out of the pan and slid them onto a plate without blotting the oil off with a paper towel the way she usually did. Her face and the tired carelessness of her movement startled him.

"Look," he said, "how about this? How about if I take the kids?"

"To the yard?"

"To the yard. I'll put them to work."

"Yuh. O.K."

No protest. Not even thanks. She went back to the sink and he ate in silence. The eggs were leathery.

The trip to the boat yard was surprisingly quiet. The boys had worn themselves out feeding and currying the four goats and they were impressed at being hired as helpers at the yard.

"Will they pay us?" Michael asked.

"*I* will."

"How much?"

"Twenty cents an hour for you and ten for Timmy."

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"That doesn't seem like very much." This from Timmy.

"You're just starting out. Life's hard when you're just starting out."

And there it rested. The boys really didn't have any choice. They rode in silence, three men going to work.

The route was mostly by back roads. It took them through small clusters of weathered and tar-papered shacks surrounded by rusting auto bodies, broken lobster traps, spare lumber, battered dories, baby carriages filled with kindling — nothing expendable in this harsh land.

"What's that?" Timmy asked. There was something quite bloody in the road ahead.

"Probably a fox," Michael said from the back seat with the annoying assurance of an older brother. He had been curled up in fetal comfort in a clutter of brown-stained drop cloths. Now he leaned forward with interest.

"Tail's not big enough," Erik said. Its head had been mashed, but the rest of it looked rather like a woodchuck. He slowed up, partly to swing clear of it and partly to see it better.

"Poor little fox," Timmy said. His tone was one he reserved for dead mice, dead flies, and even ants. Erik found this vaguely disturbing. Shouldn't the boy be out trapping and skinning animals at his age? It was hard to know; he had no measure with which to judge what a country boy should be doing.

"Save your pity," he said. "He had to go sometime. That way's as good as another."

"Yuch!" Michael said.

"What do you mean, 'yuch'?"

"Well, *I* wouldn't want to go that way — just like a thing."

"You wouldn't know what hit you."

They drove on in silence for a few moments. Erik gripped the wheel, angry at himself for reasons he couldn't place. There were times when he said things to the boys he didn't really believe and that didn't make any sense to him. It was as if they drove him to it.

"Daddy," Timmy said, "couldn't we go back and give it a funeral?"

"It's a dead goddamned *thing* in the road. What's the matter with you?"

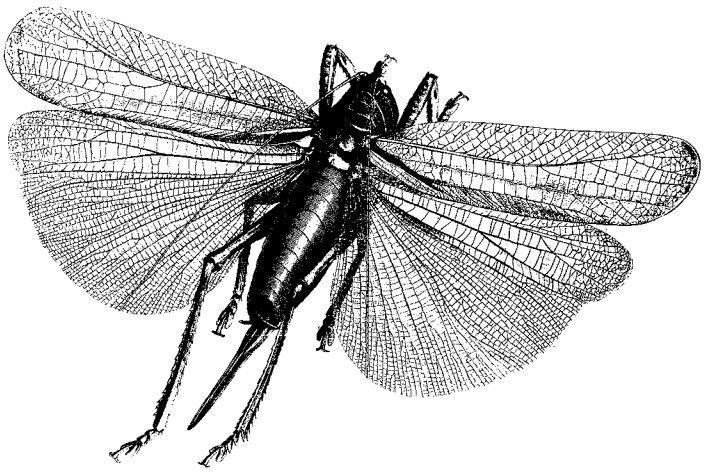
That killed the conversation. They drove the rest of the way in silence.

By the time they reached the boat yard, the incident had been forgotten. As soon as they turned onto the old, pitted, dirt road, the boys started jumping in their seats, exaggerating the bumps in the road and laughing. Erik swerved unnecessarily on the curves, joining the joke.

When he caught sight of the old gray sheds and the cold shimmer of the bay beyond, he found himself looking for other cars. There were none. Most of the men avoided Sunday work. He felt a twinge of regret. For an instant he had imagined arriving with two lanky adolescents, shaggy haired, slouching, and good-natured. Erik and his boys, all members of that kindly, shabby group who spent their days scraping and caulking and painting.

But the illusion was broken by their shrieks of delight at those bumps in the road. He pulled to a stop by the main shed with more abruptness than was necessary. His sons had altogether too much exuberance. And they were too verbal. He wished they were more like the boys who went lobstering — low keyed, given to wry comments delivered straight-faced. *They* never jumped in their seats or shrieked like that, not even at five. They had been hardened in a way his own had not — in a way *he* had not.

"O.K. now," he said sharply as soon as they were in the chill twilight of the main shed, "if you're old enough to work, you're old enough to remember a few basic rules." Both boys looked at him soberly. "You stick to your own work, right? If you take a break, just let me know and then rest. No wandering off and climbing on other boats. And a couple of other things. No teasing, no complaining. Keep your eyes on your work. And don't keep chattering away. You boys talk too much."



The boys nodded solemnly, and they began opening and mixing paints. It was an old lobster boat they were working on — a large, scruffy vessel but proudly equipped with a converted Chrysler engine, eight cylinders, and over $6,000 worth of electronic gear.

Erik felt a reverence for such boats. Each one represented a lifetime of work. Most of the lobstermen had started with open dories powered by outboards and year by year worked toward something they could take pride in. Erik's starting point was land based, the Nubian goats. Four so far and one pregnant. He had land for grazing and new markets for the fur, the milk — used in yogurt — and the animals themselves as pets. All it would take was an agony of work.

For a while, the boys worked quietly and steadily. Erik stayed above them, painting the decks a utility gray. The boys remained on the ground below, assigned to the red-copper bottom paint. There was a good margin for error there; and Timmy, too young for real work, could pretend to be doing his part. Erik could finish that side later.

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It was just as well that the other workers were not down that day. Theirs was an easy, close fraternity of men who had gone to school together. Erik was still the outsider. They respected his strength and his willingness to work, but they were uneasy about a man who raised goats and sold yogurt to summer people. "How's things on the Musk Ox Farm?" they would ask as if Erik and his family were themselves some slightly odd herd. His boys, not yet fully broken to work, would not have been appreciated.

At the end of the second hour, the complaints began to mount. What time was it? How much longer would it take? How come the paint was so drippy? He held his temper, but he wondered how long it would be before they would stay with a job.

"Lunch break," he said, and there were exaggerated groans of relief. "Come on now, you've only put in two hours." He climbed down the ladder to help Timmy wrap his brush in newspaper. He watched Michael out of the corner of his eyes, pleased that his eldest was willing to imitate the ritual without being instructed.

He would have preferred to eat down by the shore — the sun made it warmer outside than in. But the boys wanted to eat in the cockpit and they needed some reward.

Erik opened his can of beer and leaned against a pile of life preservers, ropes, and tarpaulins stained red with bottom paint. He drew his knees up under his chin to rest his back. Looking aft he could see a kind of trail in the dirt floor where the skids under the cradle had been dragged last fall. Soon — the next day, perhaps — they would move the cradle back again along that same path, easing it with cables, prying it this way and that with crowbars, old Skolfield cursing without anger, nudging it until it was on the tracks which led from the door down to the sea. This was the part that Erik liked — sweating under the directions of the old master, a distant relative by marriage, responding to terse directions — "Ease her an inch thisaway . . . . I didn't mean no inch-and-a-quarter." Up from the sea in the fall, down again in the spring. The yard had been built in the Civil War and that rhythm — a six-month tide — had been repeated for over a hundred years.

"Well," he said, coming back to the task at hand, "lunch time is over. Back to work."

"So soon?" Michael asked.

"So soon," he said. "Let's get this over with quickly. Your mother doesn't like being left home all alone on a Sunday. Neither would you."

"But I'm not a grownup."

"Grownups don't change *that* much. Think you can finish with that bottom paint in an hour or so?"

"Jees." Michael's enthusiasm was flagging; Timmy's was gone.

"This isn't any fun," he said.

"So who promised fun? Do you think *I* come down here for fun? Listen," he said, again on the edge of rage, "this has to be done. Are you old enough for it or not?"

They all went back to work in silence. There was no way of telling how they felt about it. He didn't really want to know. Besides, he had given them a choice, hadn't he?

He threw himself into brute effort. Mindless, he moved the brush as rapidly as it would go without splattering. His arm and back ached, but it would all be worth it. If he was going to be known as the grubber, he might as well earn the title.

There had been times when he had been put down for that, of course. Like the previous week when he was varnishing masts outside, moving fast, and old Skolfield gave him hell. "No sense to that. Stop and look up." The sky was purple-black with rain clouds. "Any fool could see it's going to rain and ruin everything you've done there. You work like a grubber, you do. A man's got to look up once in a while."

Well, that was an exception. Most of the time it paid to get the job done. Right now he had finished the deck and moved down into the cockpit. If he could complete that before the end of the day, they could launch her at high tide the following noon, a day before promised. There would be satisfaction in that.

When the squall hit, he was caught by surprise.

"Damn it to hell!" Timmy's voice from outside. And then "thunk!" like a brush being slapped against the hull. Again, "*thunk!*"

Erik scrambled up out of the cockpit and jumped to the ground without even touching the ladder. "Watch it," he shouted. "No paint slinging in this yard. What's going on?"

"It keeps *drip*ping," he wailed and deliberately whacked the wet paint again.

Erik's temper snapped with that third slap of the brush. It was a goddamned tantrum, that's what it was. He charged at his son, head lowered like a bull. "Didn't I just tell you . . ."

The boy was eye-wide terrified, but he held his ground. His face was streaked with dirt, tears, and red paint; he was a tiny savage in bloody war paint.

Erik stopped, put his hands on his hips, stared down at Timmy, and laughed.

"Hail, Timothy," he said, "King of the Pigmies."

The boy's paintbrush struck him hard on the left cheek, an inch below his eye.

In the nightmare which followed there were no clear pictures. Somehow he had got the boy jammed down over his knees to spank his rear, and over the howling there was another child yelling and beating him about the shoulders and neck like a mother bird. And at some point the other child got his thrashing too, cries echoing as if in a cave, sending a flock of outraged pigeons wheeling out from the rafters.

The trip home was as silent as a funeral. It was perfect idiocy, he decided, trying to shape them in the image he wanted for himself. His own father had been a distant figure, working at the hardware store all day and caring for the books evenings and even some weekends. He was hard on himself and others. Once in a long while, the old man would loosen up enough to talk. Usually it was

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about his childhood, his life on the farm which in retrospect he made sound ideal. All the good values were back there. But these were such rare moments — how could Erik learn from those how to be a father? These boys made him feel brutish, clumsy, and irascible.

On the way home he stopped at a general store and bought a Popsicle for each of the boys. They muttered thanks and he started the Jeep and continued on their way.

"Aren't you having any?" Michael asked.

"I don't feel like eating."

Michael held out his Popsicle stick. "Here," he said. "Have a bite."

Erik took a bite for the ritual of it. Then Timmy, with a nudge from his brother, made his offering. Erik accepted that too.

When at last they drove down their own muddy road, past the family cemetery, and around the barn, they were talking about the goats and what the billy did to get the nanny pregnant, and how they would market the fur, and how the place would one day support them all without his having to find outside work, how they would share it, and, yes, how there would be a time when the boys would be running it themselves. It was marvelous how often they could listen to all that when they were in the mood.

Pulling to a stop by the house, he noticed that the wind had shifted to the north, coming in hard and cold. He also saw fabric draped over the juniper bushes. It reminded him of the wisps of musk ox hair they used to find when they first moved there. But no, it was clothing. The laundry — she hadn't bothered to use clothespins, hadn't even finished the rest of the load. Shirts, sheets, and pillowcases were scattered in the tall grass. What he had first seen in the juniper was a pair of her panties. Incredibly careless.

"Damn her," he said aloud. If he was willing to care for children for a whole afternoon, couldn't she finish a simple job?

"You play outside," he said to the boys. He went inside, slamming the door behind him. She was not in the kitchen or the livingroom. "Sal," he called.

"Upstairs."

He charged up, shaking the house. He found her in bed, listening to music from the portable radio, the cat curled up beside her. In bed in the middle of the day? Her maternal privilege, perhaps, but not his image of her.

"The laundry's all over the yard," he said.

"I've had it," she said.

"*You've* had it! Wait till I tell you about *my* goddamned day."

"I mean the baby."

He took a deep breath. "Here? Alone?"

She nodded, pointing to the floor beside the bed without looking down. There, surrounded by dark-stained towels and torn sheeting, was the chamber pot. And in it, curled and bloody, was his child. It was about as long as his own thumb. He knelt down.

She was saying something. Repeating it. "Erik, is it a boy or a girl?"

"Never mind that. What about you? Are you bleeding?"

"I'm all right, I guess. It's stopped. But the laundry's blowing all over the hillside. I had to leave it."

"To hell with the laundry." How could she be thinking about that when her whole being should have been filled with rage against what had happened. No, rage against *him*. He had left her alone — no car and no phone. And there had been signs. "Any fool could see it." Skolfield's words. Crazy for work, he'd gone and ruined everything. Spending his day midwifing a goddamned boat! Was he blind as well as brutal?

"My fault," he muttered, laying his head on the edge of the bed. "The whole idea." He meant coming to live there in the first place. Trying to make the land work for them. He had made a brute of himself. Even the boys had more sensitivity than he, wanting to bury that miserable thing in the road. No wonder men had abandoned the farms, blunted by the agony of effort. Brutalized.

"A killing place. It's turned into a killing place."

His eyes filled with tears for the first time since childhood. He had hold of her arm. He had led her into this and now he would have to lead her out again. They would have to start looking for a new life all over again.

"*Not* a killing place," she said.

"I killed it."

"Don't be stupid. Listen, we shouldn't be saying 'it,' we should find a name which could be either." He looked at her, amazed, but she went on. "Like Robin, maybe. It's a spring name. And I've been thinking — could we bury him or her in the cemetery? With a little stone? Some kind of marker."

"O.K.," he said gently, "but you hush up now. Get some rest." He wasn't following her. It sounded morbid to him. It wasn't good to be talking like that.

"I've *been* hushed up all afternoon," she said gently. "I've had time to think. That's our cemetery too, now. I was thinking, maybe we could fix up the other stones. Set them up. Fence it. And let the goats crop the plot. Keep it trim. I like that, having the goats keeping it trim. And . . . hey, don't look at me as if I'm sick. I'll be O.K. tomorrow. Can you do my chores this afternoon?"

He nodded. "Stupid question."

"Don't forget the laundry."

"Laundry first. Then milking the goats."

"Yes, the goats. And feeding the dogs."

"There's a fish head for the cat."

"Hamburger for the four of us?"

"Hamburgers, and we still have three jars of our own beets. You know, we did all right last winter. Three jars left and it's spring already."

In a great flooding of gratitude he laid his shaggy head on her stomach. Instinctively she winced, but there was no need to; he rested it there with a new gentleness, weightless with compassion. Touching her there, he felt in the same instant a remorse for the dead and a new, trembling love for the living. □

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SISTERING

by Isabelle Casey

I am at the window hoping. Hoping it will be one of her good nights so we can go. I know my line now real good. But Elana comes slowly. Her violet hat is pulled down over her ears. Her head is drooping. My chest tightens.

Throughout dinner her eyes are downcast. I try to cheer her. Say gay things like: "made a rice pudding for desert."

"Nice," she says. Her voice sounds chokey.

"Layer of custid-did on top."

"Ummm," she hums, as she tastes the pudding. But she does not smile or lift her head.

I wash the dishes. She begins to dry. She stuffs and twists the towel into the coffee cup, holding it by the handle. The handle comes off in her hand.

She crys: "Aaah, Aaah," and stamps upstairs.

I finish the dishes. I scour the sink. I clean off the stove. I open the door and free the cat.

Then I go to the piano. I begin to play Elana's favorite, "Falling Leaves." I miss a note and I go back; I miss a note and I go back. Then I go ahead a while. Good. Very good. Oh, I'm going good! I miss a note and I go back; I miss a note and—

"Louise! Louise!"

I have to go up.

"Your head bad?" I ask her. "Is that what ziz-is?"

"Oooh-ha, Oooh-ha," she moans, walking up and down, up and down on the rug of blue leaves and red circles, ferns and fans, naked trees, and blue loops and scrolls. Elana's foot presses past two stains of carmine. I splashed them there one night when Elana was happy and we were painting roses inside bowls of wood. Elana's bowl hangs between her bed and mine and the roses look fresh-cut. Mine ran. Too much carmine on my brush, Elana said, but try again. I will.

"When did it start?" I ask her.

"Oh I don't know. Sometime. What's the difference?"

"I'll get aspirin," I say.

"You *know* it never helps."

"Can't we go tonight?"

"Oooh-ha, Oooh-ha," she moans, walking up and down, up and down.

Maybe it will stop before eight. I practiced my line all day and I can say it real good.

"This roaring train won't stop!" Elana cries, clapping her hands against the sides of her head.

"Maybe hot tea?"

"No, no!"

"Cocoa?"

"You *know* it makes me sick."

"I'll get a coo-cool cloth." I run down the hall to the bathroom and wring out a washcloth and run back.

"Now lie down," I say, "now lie down. Go ahead."

She does.

I kneel by the bed. I smooth back her red curls and press the wrung-out cloth on her forehead. I turn it over, and then over, and then over. Her eyes close. I kneel there still as stone. Pins and needles attack my feet and travel up my legs. From the knees down I have no legs. After many minutes, I move. On my hands and knees I haul myself across to the bureau and pull myself up and jiggle my feet and rub my legs until they return.

It is seven. If she sleeps three-quarters of an hour we can still go and I can say my line.

I whisper it: "Wee, miss-your." Good. "Wee, miss-your." Oh, good. "Wee, miss-your, wee, miss-your." Good, good. Oh!

I change my stockings and with a tissue rub off my patent leather shoes. I shake out my green flower-print dress. With my atomizer I spray some 'Anticipation' around the edge of the neckline and down inside near the bosom. I shake the dress again and it gives off a blossomy, goodsey scent. Then I spray my hands with 'Anticipation' to overpower the onion smell.

ISABELLE CASEY is married, lives in New York. She says, "If I wasn't so meticulous about every word I write, I would have published more stories by this time." One of her hobbies is "remembering".

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I look at myself in the mirror. An upside-down pear face, with fuzzy pale hair and brown bruises for eyes. I pinch my cheeks so they will bloom.

Elana stirs. She sits up. She yawns. "What time is it?"

"Twenty till eight."

"To *eight!* Come on. We must hurry," she says.

And we go. Walking fast. Hurrying. Running down the stairs to the church basement. Most of them are there. Miss Lindell is there and she says, "I hope everyone has his and her lines down *pat.*"

Wee, miss-your. Wee, miss-your. Wee, miss-your.

Elana is talking to the man with the wide smile. He lays his hand on her shoulder and says something into her ear. Elana throws back her head and laughs. Her teeth are a white stone arch.

They go up on the stage together. They say their lines and miss none.

The tall worm-shaped girl wiggles on with them and she says her lines crisp and smart, with every *T* sounded, and every *P* sounded, and every *D* sounded at the end of her words.

Now I am behind the curtain. Soon I must go on. My hands are a bunch of white knobs.

Miss Lindell says, "*Now*, Louise."

My legs move me on. I am far away in a wild place.

"*Now*, Louise! Go ahead, go ahead!"

My mouth opens. It says: "wee-wee-wee, mush-mish-mush-mis-SURE".

I run off and down into the room in the back. I pull the costumes along on the rack. Three pink, two blue, and one black. Three pink, two blue and one black. Three pink, two—

"Coffee, Louise," Miss Lindell calls.

Bitter mud, that is coffee; and the cookies are paste in my mouth.

There is music and some of them are dancing. Elana is still with the man with the wide smile.

On my hands onion is overpowering 'Anticipation.'

The wide-smiling man walks home with us, talking to Elana. Our shadows move ahead — high, low, low — come together, go under our feet and follow behind.

At the house I say, "Good-good morning. Oh no! Good-good night," and run in and go upstairs.

In the bureau mirror my face is a stone pear.

I sit on the edge of my bed, my hands clasped. I become immovable. I am a statue.

"What? Still up?" Elana says, when she comes in.

"I was just thinking," I say.

"It's late. Must get to bed," she says.

I remain still.

Elana undresses quickly and hustles into her nightgown. She lies down on her bed. The room is silent.

Suddenly she cries out: "Oh no, no, my head! My head! A roaring train again."

I move. Fast. Run down the hall to the bathroom, wring out the washcloth, and run back. Gently I press the cloth on Elana's forehead. Then I turn it over; and over; and over; and over. □

BOB PERCHAN

TWO POEMS

PUMPING ETHYL

I dreamed we could get married
in any gas station in America
between the gumball and cigarette machines

while the priest stood on the hydraulic lift

going up as slow as yeast, and
down the hiss of compressed
air as organist

with the little numbers on the pumps
flipping back into their sockets
like drunken friends

at the reception

when all the cake is gone

DIPLOMATIQUE

Chinamen bowl with porcelain balls.
The eyes of cats go round and round
and when the pins fall
they get up again, as if by magic.

Score is kept by drawing
pictures of the pinsetter
wiping his spectacles.

It is a rare sight.
The old men laugh
when someone rolls a gutterball,
maintaining it saves time and trouble.

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Anything You Want

by Peter LaSalle

"Anything you want?"

"That's right, anything," said the veterinarian. "You know some like it different ways. She's a one in a million."

"Of course."

The veterinarian had picked me up in his battered, bulb-fendered Morris outside of Oughterard. It was December and even when it was sunny the light in the West of Ireland never was much. According to my official Youth Hostel Association handbook there was a hostel about twenty-five miles north at the Twelve Bens.

The pubkeeper in Oughterard had told me the red bus would come along the main road at about three. My plan was to hitch and if I didn't get a ride I would eventually wave down the bus en route. I walked about a mile outside of the town of the usual gray-stuccoed buildings with purplish slate roofs. The hedgerows were thick and still green with holly and the sky was striped gray-and-white like a huge feather. The veterinarian said he was going by the local outer road along the sea, which was longer. But he guaranteed to get me to Macon Cross which I remembered as a red dot on my map indicating where the two roads met again. It was only five miles or so south of the hostel and I easily could hike that.

The veterinarian wore a tweedy rust coat that was frayed at the elbows. His black rubber boots were splattered with dry mud and he was dark-haired and red-faced. For a while the road was straight and the soggy peat bogs stretched flat like the ocean on either side of us. We passed a generating plant that was a huge concrete affair with a main kiln shaped like a laboratory flask. The smell of burning earth was strong.

"The only one in the world," said the veterinarian.

"The plant?"

"The only one that burns peat for electricity. Peat. Peat. Peat. There are men here whose whole lives are peat. They wake up in cottages and look out the window at it. They tramp off to work and dig it. They go home at night to take frozen bricks of it out of a bin and bring it inside to burn in the fireplace. It's a bleak land. Why, Jamie Mullins in Oughterard says the chief pastime of the male population in Connemara is peating off. I tell you I couldn't stay here if it weren't for the wife of the gard. The one, like I say, who will give you anything you want. I mean I get to Dublin once in a while. But she keeps me going."

"Of course. But what about the gard?" The gards, of course, were the Irish police.

"Oh, he's a useless oaf. He's down in the barracks in Oughterard most of the time anyway. There's been some trouble lately."

"IRA?"

"Not at all. The owner of the hotel there has started to build a golf course outside of the town. There were some farmers who wouldn't sell their land because the price wasn't right. Then he said he didn't want it. He would use the land he had for a nine-hole course instead of the eighteen. That angered the farmers. A vicious lot. They shot at the operator of his steam shovel just last year. But their misfortune is my bit of luck. I can just nip by on her during my rounds while the gard is busy. It's a tidy set-up, if you know what I mean." He winked.

The tires hummed along the narrow road which was rough with crushed limestone. We were past the peat

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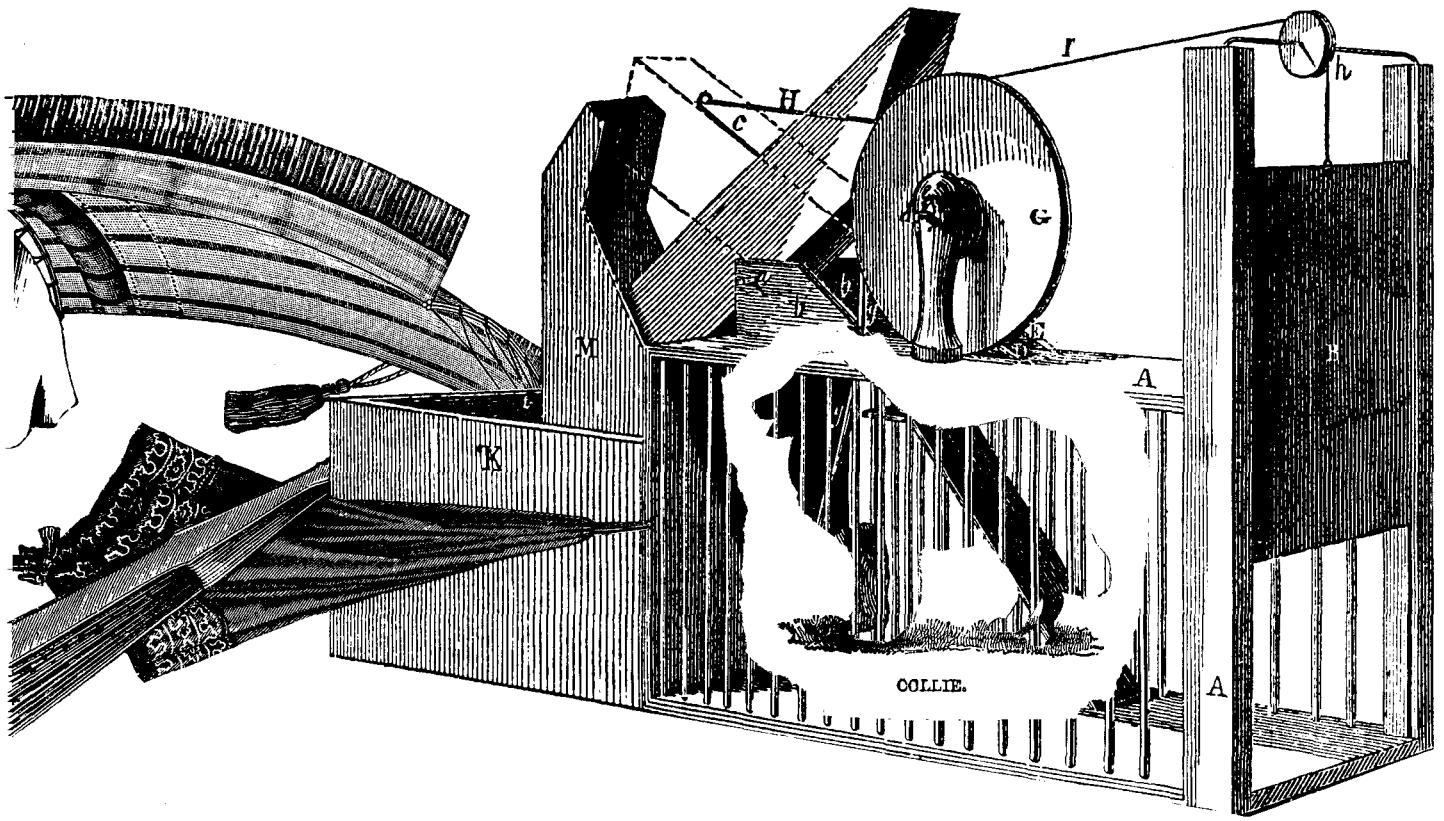

fields now and the road began to meander like a stream. There was more stone than grass on the scrubby hills and they looked almost lunar. I was on my grand tour of Europe and though everybody had warned me the West of Ireland was bleak indeed in winter, I wanted to see as much as I could in the few weeks I had in each country. I planned to stay abroad a year.

"You need the sun to bring out the color," said the veterinarian. "I mean it's a miserable old place without it. But you ought to see it in summer. Like heaven. And it's overrun with the girls your age hitching then. Now I've had them all. I like the Yanks, mind you, but they're not nearly as lively as the Aussies and New Zealanders. A bit daff I suppose and sometimes as gruff as bulldogs. it's the ones from down under who like a good time. sus, just talking about it makes me want a touch."

The first place we stopped really wasn't a town. There ere three or four whitewashed buildings. One was a mbination store and pub with a green-and-yellow metal gn outside that said "Telefon." The people were very grim and I didn't detect a single smile. The dog slept in a corner inside the dimly lit store which again smelled of the burning peat. It was a dirty yellow mongrel and it kept its head on the dark stone floor as it looked up through the one good eye that was brown with a shiny square of reflected light inside. I stayed back with the rest of them. They all wore dark clothes. The veterinarian, scuffed medical bag in hand, approached and the dog raised a black lip like licorice. But the man was masterful with him. He told me to hold him down and he deftly bathed the eye that was somewhat waxy and caked with dried blood. The mongrel tensed and I could feel him trying to lift himself with his haunches. But he must have sensed he was in helping hands and in a few seconds was only whimpering.

"That should do it nicely," said the veterinarian and he snapped shut the bag. The fragrance of the disinfectant mingled with the smoky smell. He planted his hands on the small of his back and stretched. He was a small man with a bobbed nose. It was veined with a roadmap of surfaced blood vessels. He probably was in his mid-thirties. A shrivel-faced old woman with a black shawl was mumbling something in syllables that were very airy and lilting. It was Gaelic. He turned to me.

"So, he'll be all right."

"Was it a dog fight?"

"A wild swan. They can be mean when angered. I've seen them tear a grown fox to pieces."

He waved away the woman who was fingering some silver coins. He said to me we should have a drink and we sat down at a long low table behind which was a shelf of Guinness bottles. The woman tugged two open and the taste was bitter and burnt. The veterinarian pointed to the tan, oval-shaped label on the bottle. He told me he had read about a man in Dublin who pasted the label inside his front windshield as a registration voucher and got away with it for months before he was caught. The second bottle was more palatable and by the third I fully agreed with the veterinarian that the

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PETER LaSALLE is a faculty fellow in creative writing at Johnson State College (Vermont). He is active in journalism and criticism, and is presently at work on a novel.

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stuff wasn't bad at all when not cooled. Behind the grating of the cast-iron stove the peat was like neon glowing. I asked the woman where I could find the gents' room and she pointed toward a back door.

"Wasting your equipment, running water through it," said the veterinarian with his wink. "Should save it for what it was made for."

In the latrine built against the side of the place I relieved myself and the little cement gully below steamed with the warm. I zipped up and my undershorts jammed in the teeth. I fiddled to loosen the zipper for what seemed forever and I knew I was somewhat drunk.

The veterinarian stood beside the Morris waiting for me. He had four more bottles of the Guinness under his arm.

"Jaysus, what were you doing in there. Waiting for it to grow?"

"Sorry, my zipper got jammed."

"So, all set?"

"Yes."

"Ah, the drink brings it out in me, you know." We were in the car. The small motor at first didn't start. Then it sputtered into an uneasy rumble. "I'm dying for a touch." He smiled somewhat dreamily. "How about yourself?"

"A touch."

"Crumpet, man. A fur serving. I mean I've got one more stop and then we could nip by the gard's cottage. It would be nice to take the stiffening out of it."

"Of course. I mean as long as you can get me to the main road. I can wait. I've got a book in my backpack."

"A bo-ook." He rolled his eyes. "Now what would you want to go sticking your nose in a book for when you could be poking it somewhere else? Why, you don't think I'd be as in-hospitable as not to invite you for a turn yourself?"

"Oh, that really isn't necessary."

"Don't be a fool. Like I say to you. She's a one in a million. I've brought my mates to her before. And believe me she's as clean as fresh laundry. Now she's not entirely good looking. But she's all right."

The sun came out and the tumbling clouds made shadows that moved like big monsters across the stony landscape. At last we could see the water. In the distance it was so blue it seemed touched-up as they do for postcards and the small bay was spotted with little islands that looked like so many grassy clumps from so far away.

"That *is* something," was all I said. I swigged on the bottle as we rolled along. The veterinarian nodded his head and the cool air outside suddenly was salty.

His next call was to a large seaside estate to give some shots to a riding horse. We turned off the coast road and rattled down a rutted, unpaved drive. As the veterinarian turned through the stone gates he simply said, "Anglos, you know."

The house was an eighteenth-century monstrosity with at least six chimneys. It rose like a single block of gray stone out of a flat of grass and around it there was only that lawn without any trees or shrubbery. We drove around the back to the stables.

"Well, I suppose I might as well go in and see the man's horse and have it over with. I'll only be a while."

"I think I might walk down by the water. Will I have time?"

"Certainly. I'll sound the horn when I'm finished."

The path led down the hill which became very steep. There was a wooden dock of somewhat rotted planks. On top of it were three or four banana-shaped curraghs. They were like canoes with tar coating them. A pile of stringy, rust-colored kelp was at least six-foot high. I was still drunk but comfortably so. I dropped myself to the grass and hit in a plop. The ground was soggy and the cold wet stung. I didn't care. Orange-beaked gulls looped and squawked and a chugging noise grew steadily louder. A snub-nosed fishing boat draped with nets like dirty lace emerged in the distance from behind one of the grassy island mounds. I shut my eyes for a while and then got up to start back. I turned around maybe once or twice to look again at it all.

I could hear loud voices. In front of the stable the veterinarian was arguing with a short bald man in amber riding boots and shirtsleeves. They talked low when they saw me and I simply went around to where the car was parked in the driveway. From the front window of the huge house a girl in what looked like a school uniform was staring at me through the black, distorted glass. She had long brown hair and she was pale. She also was somehow womanly and could have been about eighteen.

I got in the car and when I looked back she still was there. I smiled and as soon as I did she was gone. I tried for a long time to think of what she looked like. Yes, she was beautiful. The uniform had been maroon, I remembered. It was Friday. Was she home for the weekend? I wondered where she went to school. Dublin? Galway? I never would know.

The veterinarian stamped toward the car. The fat man in shirtsleeves shouted after him:

"And you can tell that rotter Riley the same!"

The veterinarian didn't look back. He tossed the bag to me and cursed the Morris, which as always was slow to start. Once he got it going he spun it around in the driveway and we were about a mile down the lane when he jammed on the brakes. I shoved my hand against the windshield to steady myself.

"I hate coming out here. I mean I like my work well enough. But I hate having to go see him." He leaned over the back seat and came up with a bottle of something clear. The top was stuffed with a cork. There was no label. The veterinarian uncorked it with his teeth, squinted his eyes fringed with crows' feet and swallowed a long gulp as if it were distasteful medicine. But medicine nevertheless. He wiped his mouth with his sleeve and handed it to me.

"Here."

"What is it?"

"Poteen. Homebrew." I swallowed it far back on my tongue. It actually burned. We sat there drinking for a

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good half hour. The Morris cooled with soft clicking noises and a thrush seemed to be stuck in the hedgerow beside the car. It fluttered madly, then was off in a swoop. I was uncontrollably drunk. I thought I might get sick but I didn't. The drink revived the veterinarian's spirits. He was grinning again. He finished the last of the bottle, let go with a loud belch, and then sighed, "Ahhhhhhh." He stared at the roof of the car. "Now that's better. This job has its trials. I need the drink to unwind. And now I need a little something else." He patted the metal dashboard as if the Morris were a trusty horse. "All right, good fellow. Don't let me down now. Damn if I'm not about to burst. Now I don't want you to expect all that much," he said to me. "Like I said, she's not entirely bad looking. In fact in a way she's quite full, jolly. Not an ugly woman by any means. But she's a one in a million. She'll give you anything you want. I mean she's only too glad to accommodate a man and she can't get her fill of it herself. When was the last time you had it?"

"Me?" I calculated. I had been in Europe a celibate two months. And then before I left too. "A while back," I admitted.

"Well, there's no use waiting any longer then, is there?" We were off. The gears ground like castanets. He kept the Morris straddling the yellow line in the curving road. "It's a sound idea to keep a car aimed on the dead center when you've been nipping the poteen."

Now I must say I never have been one to take advantage of a girl. Honestly. In college I would meet women with the same interests as me and after a while I would get to sleep with them. It usually took time. I never have been a suave charmer by any means and I don't think there is a girl I had my stay with in bed who didn't consider me as a "good friend" for a long time after we stopped dating. In fact, I suppose women's rights types would judge me a decent, considerate male. But riding along that road, and dizzy with so much alcohol, I hungered for that wife of the gard. I wanted to have her again and again and again. And I conjured up vivid pictures of myself doing just that. I conjured up pictures of me doing the same with the girl I had just seen in the window. I conjured up pictures of me tumbling with girls I had known whom I hadn't thought about for years.

"This poteen is all right." I said.

"Lovely, isn't it?" The veterinarian smiled as he drove.

The cottage was gray-stuccoed and inside the stone wall three sheep with dirty faces munched in what seemed like slow motion. Their noses were black and wet.

"I can tell you again, I'm bursting for it," said the veterinarian.

"So, I'll wait here."

"Not at all. I told you I wouldn't indulge and not offer you your fair share."

"Of course. No, you see I'm all for it. Bursting, like you say. Don't get me wrong. I just thought that maybe you could tell her I'm with you. I mean if you just drag me in unannounced it might prove awkward. But believe me, I'll be in. I'll just wait for your signal."

"Signal, my arse. Don't be ridiculous, man. Just come with me." Actually I kept a few steps behind. The walk was a dirt path and the stone in front of the door was worn like a rounded, used bar of soap. The door itself was painted glossy blue while the place for the most part was ill-kept and ramshackle. The veterinarian quickly passed his hand over his short dark hair and knocked in two quick raps. I waited to hear footsteps. I longed for a delightful giggle.

"I wouldn't put it past her," the veterinarian whispered to me, "to be tugging off her knickers. Many a time that she's met me in the skin." We waited a few seconds more. "Hmmm. Best rap again." He did. We waited a few minutes. "That's strange." He banged this time. "Delia! Dee! It's me, Gerard." Nothing. "I can't figure this out. I mean. Excuse me." I stepped aside and he walked around to a window, cupped his hands to cut out the reflection and then went to another, and another.

"She's not here?" I said weakly.

"I don't understand it." He knocked on the door again. "Dee! Dee!" he was shouting. "Deeee!"

"Yes, I guess she isn't here." I seemed to sober automatically.

"Deeee!" He pounded. "DEEE!"

"Ah, I don't think it's any use. She must have stepped out."

"Stepped out?" His voice was vacant. He wasn't even looking at me. He sat down on the step. "Stepped out." He wasn't even talking to me. He seemed thoroughly heartbroken. In fact I wouldn't have been surprised if he broke down and cried. "Deeeeee" he moaned lowly. "Deeee. I wanted her so much."

"Well, nothing won, nothing lost."

"Deeeee." The sheep bleated as he kept repeating the name.

I was tired. I had gotten up early that morning in Galway so as to be on the road early. The short day was rapidly darkening and the veterinarian said nothing. The intersection called Macon Cross was marked with a sign on a galvanized pole that said just that.

"The hostel is about four miles up. Again, I'm sorry about getting your hopes up. I just don't understand it. I'll tell you what. I'll drive you to the hostel."

"No. No need. But thanks anyway. The hike will do me good. I need the air." I knew it wasn't a good idea to walk into a hostel with the smell of liquor on your breath. A lot of the wardens got carried away with the regulations.

"Well, all the best," said the veterinarian.

"Same to you. And thanks again. I really enjoyed that coast road. I mean I got to see a lot."

"You were lucky to get a splash of the sun. It brings out the colors."

"So long."

"All the best."

He was gone. I could hear the whine of the engine for

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a while and then it died out in the distance. The coming of night was strangely still. On one side of me were some high, stony mountains. On the other a thin lake, some rounded hills and a few trees which were silhouettes against the fading melon color of the sky. The trickle of running water was soft all around me and I pulled on the shoulder straps of my nylon pack to tighten them a notch. The weight felt best when it rode high up on the flesh of the blades like that. For a while I could see no lights at all. I felt remarkably fit for having poured down so much. I still had some thick bacon and brown bread and I would fry my dinner at the hostel. I thought of the veterinarian and it all seemed entirely ridiculous. I was glad I was traveling. I was glad I was seeing so much, meeting so many people.

I had gone to work for a local daily newspaper outside of Boston after I graduated from college. I must admit I liked the work. I liked going out for a story about a housing or sewerage program in the morning and coming back from city hall to the newsroom to write for deadline. I liked working at my green metal desk with the teletypes around me spouting their yellow copy printed in purple. I liked the smell of dusty copy paper and the fragrance of the gooey rubber cement I would use to paste the takes of my stories together. But I never had traveled. I told myself there would be plenty of time later for work. I was raised by my uncle, a hard-working man who still lives in Manchester, New Hampshire. After I quit my job I went back there for about a week before I was to fly out of Logan. He told me I shouldn't have quit. He said I would be sorry. I woke one morning to see him standing over me in his baggy flannel pajamas. He had the morning Manchester paper and was pointing in forceful jabs to a photograph on the front page. It was a wirephoto picture of a long line of people waiting to apply for an advertised job as a gas meter reader for Pacific Gas and Electric, I think, in San Francisco. The angle maybe made the queue seem longer than it was. The caption below listed the out-of-work people among them. There were I don't remember how many teachers, a lawyer, and six reporters.

"Do you see that," said my uncle. "Six reporters, it says, and you walk out on a job to go gallivanting around Europe like one of the Vanderbilts. I don't know. It seems foolish to me."

The hostel was the usual converted barracks. I had seen the same sort in at least three other places in Ireland. Apparently the British had built them during their run of the land. The stone walls painted white always were a full three-foot thick. This particular one was very well-kept. I went through the door marked with the official triangle hostel insignia. There was nobody in the little check-in window. I had been to many hostels where I was the only one there. And I knew the people who ran them often didn't work full schedules in the winter when there were so few hikers.

The place was spotless inside. The floors were a bright maroon and I kept my pack on as I trudged the stairs. My calves ached from the walking. I looked in the sleeping room marked with a little legged symbol for "Men" as you might see on an airport washroom door, then decided the one across the hall, the woman's dormitory, offered a better view. I suddenly was so tired. I dropped my pack to the bare striped bedticking of the lower bunk. I went to the men's lavatory. The urinals were so clean they shone and seemed like something precious. I ducked my head into the shower stall and was disappointed to see there was no shilling meter hooked up to the chromium piping. Only cold water.

Back in the dormitory room I chose a top bed that looked out over the mountains. The first stars had risen and the moon was a yellow wedge in the clear inky blue. I pulled one of the scratchy horsehair blankets up over me. I knew it wasn't good even to rest like that for a few minutes while still wearing my heavy sweater and jeans. I would be cold when I got up and had to walk around the unheated place wearing the same. The beds were framed with pipe painted flesh color. With the light off, the outside was brighter than the inside. I was thinking that I should write my uncle a note that night on one of the tissuey, green Irish airletters just to say I was in good health. I heard the squeaky voice.

"Somebody up there?" I started to swing off the bunk. "I said, somebody up there?"

The warden was a pudgy, white-haired man who was very proud of his hostel. He told me he had worked in Galway in the post office for twenty-three years and was glad he and his wife had the jobs as wardens. It was a good occupation for old people, he explained. I handed him my yellow hostel card to check in for the night. He carefully registered my name in the big book with its pebble-grain cover. He seemed pleased to have somebody to talk to. He told me about the time the pump in the well broke down three years before in August. He had a hostel full of cycling Germans who just didn't seem to understand the toilets didn't flush and so they shouldn't use them. He took me on a tour of the kitchen. The long zinc counters were lined with little gas heating plates that looked like bunsen burners. He showed me the closets where I could store my food, said he sold good milk for a shilling and six a pint, and then explained the working of the sink.

"You light the pilot here for hot water. Now when you use a pan you take a little soap like this." He picked up the plastic bottle of amber detergent and held it to demonstrate over one of the big pans he took from the string of them on a masonite pegboard. "And you soap them good before scouring. See that shine?" I could see my reflection on both sides of the thing as he flipped it over. "That's a clean pan. I like to think the pans here are the cleanest of any hostel in Ireland. And that includes the North as well. Now a lot of wardens don't provide soap. But as I see it, it's an investment that pays for itself."

"Of course."

"It's a strange time you picked for traveling." He looked at me from head to hiking boots. "I haven't had anybody here for weeks."

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"Well, I'm only here for a couple of nights. I did want to see the West."

"It's bad now. Not much sun. You need the sun to bring out the colors in Connemara. You took the bus from Oughterard?"

"Ah, no. In fact I got a ride. With this veterinarian."

"The veterinarian. A little fellow in a gray Morris."

"That's him," I said. The hostel warden winced. He tightened the open shawl collar of his heavy sweater. I could see the steam on his breath.

"A strange one," he said. "A pity, you know."

"A pity?"

"Well," he rubbed his hand over his chin. "It's not the kind of thing that should be talked about." In any case the warden went right on recounting. "Now I'm not saying anything about his work. He takes good care of the people's stock around here and he doesn't gouge like some of them they've sent up from the farm school in Cork. Anyway, he lived a long time alone with his sister after their mother died. Poor woman. It's all a terrible pity. I shouldn't be telling this. Anyway, I've heard talk he was, well, intimate with his sister when they lived together. He took liberties. She finally married a gard to get away from him. I've heard talk that says she figured she would be safe enough with the gard. Because he is the only one around here legally entitled to carry a gun. A gard is what we call a policeman, you know. What do you say, cop?"

"Ah, yes."

"So to get back to your man the veterinarian. He left her alone for a time and then started hounding her again when the gard was away. About a year ago she and the husband the gard had to move out of their place on the coast road. They're living above the cleaners in Oughterard now. There's a farmer named Joyce who sometimes brings his sheep down to the cottage to graze. He says he's seen the veterinarian snooping around the place a lot. Once he even saw the fellow sitting there on the front step and—would you believe it?—crying like a baby." □

CAROL FROST

PURR-TALK

This poem asks how goes it, friend?
The sun is with us. Curl your arm
Hello. We're walking by like cats,
not dogs who sniff and dance around
each other's plots. Cats are neat,
discreet with eyes like crocus buds
to greet a neighbor, All is well.
These blooms are flexible as tone
of voice. A song of flowers, sing
along the sidewalk, Hi, Goodbye,
I had an operation, Oh, too bad.
Then walk away in our cool fur.
A voice like summer could not bare
most cats, their fur is a stone coat.
The season of this voice is spring.

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DELORES

I was in TheDrugStore the time I tried to call Delores, my first girl friend. When I called her, all I wanted to do was tell her about the notebooks I had been writing in and that I still intended to keep the promise I made when we were going together, to dedicate a book to her someday. But when she answered the phone, she wouldn't talk to me. She just said that she was still very happily married to Freddie the Plumber and wasn't the least bit interested in anything I had to say. Then she hung up before I could even tell her why I called.

After I got fired from the construction job, I quit going into Ziggie's. Then I just started thinking about Delores again and the way it was when we were going together. When I started thinking about Delores again, I began by sending her messages with my mind too. Like then I would tell her to remember Whiting beach and the old yellow Plymouth; or I would tell her to think about the first book dedication I ever wrote to her and what she said then.

And instead of going into Ziggie's when I was through looking for another job, I started going into all the places that reminded me of Delores, places where Delores had been too, places where the conditions would be better when I was sending her a message with my mind. Like then I would go into TheDrugStore and send her a message to remember that day I met her; or I would walk through TheDeptStore, past the perfume counter where she used to work, and just remind her of something we did before she met Freddie the Plumber.

When I went into Ziggie's after I got fired that time, he was always wanting to know how long did I really work on the construction job. Then he was always asking things like, "Hey, how long did you work on that construction job anyways? Was you there even a month?" Or he would want to know about some of the other jobs I had worked on and would say, "Hey, what happened to the job with that VeriBestCo? That was pretty good, huh? Did you quit that job sellin' cemeteries or was you fired from there too? That was good, huh? Everyday you look in the papers and somebody new has died, right?"

And when Stash Benkowski came in at noon and saw me sitting there again, he said, "Hey, Zig, git him! Haw, haw! He's took the pension with old Pete again awreddy! Haw, haw!"

Lana said not to pay any attention to them. "Don't pay any attention to them, darling," she said then, "they'll be sorry someday! You *just wait* til they hold that premiere in Hammond! They'll all be wanting to buy the beers then!

"And just remember, darling, you've always marched to the sounds of a different drummer. None of them really knows that and just think how surprised *that* Delores will be too, when she sees you've kept your promise and dedicated a book to her. That shows the whole world you *really* care! If somebody did something like that for me, I'd be greatful for all of eternity! I'll bet she's already sorry she married *that* Freddie the Plumber!"

And when I started thinking about Delores again, I remembered all the things about her. Things like how big and blue her eyes were, where she went to school, who her favorite movie star was, the cute little red BoPeep shoes she always wore, where her uncle worked, all the things she liked and didn't like. (She liked butter on popcorn, but didn't like mustard on hotdogs.) But mostly I just remembered things like the first book dedication I ever wrote to her and what she said then; and that lucky day I met her.

When I met Delores, she was in TheDrugStore, having a chocolate milk shake. I never forgot that either and always told Delores I would never forget the kind of milk shake she was drinking that day; or how I had just come into TheDrugStore from Katzy's book shop with TheGreatWriter's newest book under my arm and how I just happened to sit next to her. (Later on, I told Delores that I had seen her sitting there as soon as I came in and had *really* sat next to her on purpose.)

That was when I was trying every day to increase my vocabulary too. Then I was memorizing ten new

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WILLIAM PENROD lives in Hammond, Indiana. His ambitions are: "to finish the novel [which includes "Delores"], get a room over a liquor store, meet a girl with freckles, and write about three more novels . . ."

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words everyday because I liked the way TheGreatWriter used all those big words in the books he wrote. And as soon as I sat down next to Delores, I ordered a Coke and opened the book with the new words in it. And I had just started to memorize what *munificent* meant when Delores accidentally knocked over her chocolate milk shake and before I could get it out of the way, some of it got on TheGreatWriter's newest book. "Gee," Delores said then, looking at me for the first time with those big blue eyes, "I'm sorry."

And then I just grabbed a paper napkin and started wiping the chocolate milk shake off TheGreatWriter's new book, but when Delores said, "Gee, I'm sorry," again, I smiled and said for her not to be sorry.

"Don't be sorry," I said then, "really nothing to be sorry about. After all, I'm sure that this particular edition of TheGreatWriter's current opus can withstand the addition of a little chocolate milk shake." Then I paused, secured a fresh napkin from its holder on the counter, and continued with, "And anyway, the authorities on such matters have assured us that a little chocolate milk shake, now and then, is really most nutritious."

Delores just looked at me with those big blue eyes again. And when she said, "Gee, I'm sorry," for the third time, I tried hard to reassure her.

"Nothing to be sorry about," I said once more, "really nothing at all and I'm sure if he were here, TheGreatWriter wouldn't mind either." Then I looked deep into Delores' big blue eyes and finished with, "However, I do feel as though I must add a footnote at this juncture and point out that if it's really true, as so many of our ablest critics are wont to claim, that you can really tell a book by its cover, then it must hold true that this particular volume from the pen of the peripatetic GreatWriter must indeed be about chocolate milk shakes."

Delores just said, "Gee!" then. And then when I asked her what a nubile young Miss like herself was doing alone that time of day in the friendly neighborhood apothecary's, Delores told me about working at the perfume counter in TheDeptStore. Then I said, "Your employer is to be congratulated, having procured his fairest flower to grace his perfume counter."

Delores just lowered her big blue eyes when I said that. But when she looked at her wristwatch, she said, "Gee, I've got to go now! This is my first week at work at the perfume counter and I'll be late back to work if I don't go now!" Then Delores picked up her check and started to leave, but just as she got ready to go, I blocked her way. I stood up in front of her and taking hold of the check for the chocolate milk shake, I then said, "Allow me; allow me to pay for your chocolate milk shake."

Delores' big blue eyes showed real surprise. "Gee," she said then, "after what I did to your book and everything. I probably should be buying your Coke after what I did."

And then I said, "I couldn't possibly consider it. But, I would *indeed* deem it an honor and privilege if you allowed me the pleasure of purchasing your libation."

"Gee," Delores said one more time, her big blue eyes

by William Penrod

still wide, "after what I did to your book and everything? And I don't even know what your name is either . . . . how can I ever . . . "

"By letting me take you out tonight," I said just as I managed to get the check for the chocolate milk shake out of her hand. Delores just sat back then and looked down at her red BoPeep shoes. And then she looked at her wristwatch once more, the big moving clock over the soda fountain, her big blue eyes finally coming to rest on the check for the chocolate milk shake I was then holding firmly in my hand. "Gee, I don't even know," she started again, but then she said, "Well, all right. Only I got to be getting back to work now or I'll be late back to work from my coffee break."

Then Delores told me where she lived and what time to pick her up and I just watched as she hurried out the door and across the street to TheDeptStore, her red BoPeep shoes flashing like meteors in the sunlight.

(Later on when I told Delores that our first meeting seemed like it had been prearranged, like maybe it had been ordained by a higher power or something, she said, "Gee, it was kind of like the movie my favorite movie star was in, *Miracle on Third Avenue!* You know, where

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the prince in disguise meets and marries a girl so she can share his kingdom!")

And that night when I took Delores out for the first time, we went to see the movie playing at the Parthenon. We went to see it because her favorite movie star was in it. "He's really my very favorite movie star," she said then, "and I always go to see all the movies he's in. I even got a whole scrapbook, *just* filled with pictures of him at home. You know, he never got over his wife and says he's still in love with her. I feel so sorry for him because he's so lonesome now."

Then after the movie was over, we got into the old yellow Plymouth and drove to Whiting beach and parked there for the first time. I didn't try to kiss her that first time either. We just talked about different things. Like then Delores told me where she went to school, how she got picked to work at the perfume counter, about her uncle who worked for Colonel Sanders, frying chicken, and about other movies she had seen her favorite movie star in. When she talked about the movie we had just seen at the Parthenon, she said, "I just loved it, the way it ended! The way he went riding off into the sunset with the girl, the way he does in all his movies, I just loved it!"

And I told Delores about things I liked too. When I told her about all of TheGreatWriter's books I had read and what he had to say in some of them, she said, "Gee, he really has a lot to say about things!"

Then I let Delores borrow one of TheGreatWriter's books. It was the first one I ever read and the very next time we went out and were parked at Whiting beach, I handed it to her, and said, "This is the first book of *his* I ever read. I thought you might enjoy perusing it in a spare moment."

That was the night I told her I had even thought about writing a book someday, a book like TheGreatWriter's, a book that would really have a lot to say about things too. "Probably a rip roaring jeremiad," I said.

Delores snuggled up close to me then. "Gee," she said, "I never knew anybody that wanted to do that before. After you get to be famous, I can tell everybody I knew you *when*. Ha, ha."

Then I started telling her about some of the big words I already knew and how I was trying everyday to increase my vocabulary so I would know even more. When I told her what *munificent* meant, Delores said, "Gee, I'm gonna say that all day at the perfume counter tomorrow!" She didn't say anything when I told her what *onomatopoeia* meant.

And the night I told Delores I had made up my mind to write a book someday and was even going to dedicate it to her, she snuggled up close to me again. "Gee," she said then, "wont that be something? What will everybody say then? Wont the other girls at the perfume counter have a fit then?"

When I started writing the book dedications to Delores, I always waited until we were parked at Whiting beach in the old yellow Plymouth before I read them to her. The first one I ever wrote said:

TO DELORES, WITHOUT WHOSE HELP, LOVE AND UNDERSTANDING, THIS BOOK WOULD HAVE NEVER BEEN WRITTEN.

"Gee," Delores said when I read *that* one to her, "that's really nice. I don't know any other girl that's got a real book dedicated to her. That's really nice."

And after a while, the only place we ever went when I took Delores out was to Whiting beach so we could park there in the old yellow Plymouth. Then we just talked. Like then Delores would talk about a new movie her favorite movie star was going to be in, or who he was dating, and I would talk about an idea I had for the book I was going to write someday: or some of the new words I had just memorized and, if I had written one, I would read the new book dedication to her. But Delores liked it best when we talked about how it was going to be someday and then we were always talking about things like the castle in Spain we would live in and the big white boat we would have with her name painted on its side. We *did* kiss when we were parked at Whiting beach in the old yellow Plymouth, but we never did anything else. I wanted to, but I always told Delores I didn't want her to think I was like some guys, guys who only went out with a girl for one reason. And Delores always said, "You're different than anybody else I ever knew!"

But when Delores met Freddie the Plumber, she quit going out with me. When she met him, his powder blue convertible was always parked in front of her house; and when she had to work late, it was always parked in TheDeptStore's parking lot. And when Delores said she didn't want to go out with me any more, she said, "I don't want to go out with you any more. I'm in love with Freddie the Plumber now and don't want to go out with you any more. I'm getting married with Freddie the Plumber in June."

When Delores quit going out with me, I didn't talk to anybody or go anyplace for a long time. I just stayed in my room, thinking about her. Then I wouldn't even eat, but just stayed there in my room, thinking about her, writing poems about things we did together: how big and blue her eyes were and more book dedications. One of the poems was called: *Whiting Beach And The Old Yellow Plymouth* and I read it to her over the phone one night when I called her just to read a new book dedication I had written. I told her how it could be someday too, if she would only quit going out with Freddie the Plumber and start going out with me again. But all she would say then was that she loved Freddie the Plumber and was going to marry him in June and didn't want to go out with me any more.

The last time I called Delores then, she wouldn't even talk to me. I had just written a new book dedication and was going to read it to her, but when her mother answered the phone, she said, "Delores doesn't wish to speak to you again. Delores is marrying Freddie the Plumber in June and I don't think you should be calling here any more. I'm sure it will all be for the best too. After all, he can give her things."

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"Just tell Delores," I said then, "that I wont ever love another like I did her and that I still intend to keep the promise I made, to dedicate a book to her someday."

And the time I tried to call Delores from TheDrug-Store, I had just written a new book dedication to her:

To Delores, Because I Promised . . . . Remember Whiting Beach And The Old Yellow Plymouth?

I was going to tell her about the notebooks I had been writing in too, but when she answered the phone, she wouldn't talk to me. She just said, "I'm still very happily married to Freddie the Plumber and don't want to talk to you any more and am not the least bit interested in hearing anything you have to say either."

And *that night* Freddie the Plumber called me. I was in my room then, just thinking about Delores. Then I was looking through the pages of *that* book by TheGreat-Writer I had let her borrow. I was just thinking how her fingers had once touched those very pages and how her big blue eyes had once looked at those very words. But then Freddie the Plumber called me and he started out saying, "Hey, Budddeee, howcome you called up my wife like that?"

And I told him, "I was just missing one of my books by TheGreatWriter and I thought maybe Delores had it. That's why I called her, just to see if she had the book by TheGreatWriter I was missing."

"Budddeee," Freddie the Plumber said then, still sounding like Jimmy Cagney, "she ain't got no books of no kind around here! And, Budddeee, if you know what's good for you, you wont be calling her no more! And, Budddeee, if you ever call her again, I'm gonna get in my powder blue convertible and go lookin' for you!"

Then Freddie the Plumber told me about the black belt in judo he had, how he sometimes beat up on six or seven guys at once, how he never worried about how big the guy he had to beat up on was, and how the last guy he had to beat up on was still in the hospital. And when he finally hung up, I started going into Ziggie's again. "Long time no see," Ziggie said as soon as I sat down, "workin'?"

And while he got a beer for me, I told him about a new job I thought I would be starting on soon. Then I just sat there, next to the juke box, drinking beer and thinking about Delores. I sent her one more message with my mind then. I told her I was still going to keep the promise I made, to dedicate a book to her someday, but that now it would just be:

To Her, Who Left Me For Another . . .Remember Whiting Beach And The Old Yellow Plymouth?

When I finished doing that, I kept on sitting there too, just drinking more beers, and that night I could really *see* how it would be someday when I finished writing in the notebooks:

Then everybody was talking about the mysterious girl they were dedicated to. And because of all the interest, they even had a special on TV with TheGreatWriter so he could talk about it. *His* eyes were piercing; *his* hair uncombed; *his* voice a sonic boom and when he went on TV, he started out by talking about some of the other great men who had been done wrong by women. He talked about men like Van Gogh, Lincoln and Mickey Rooney, just a few of the other great men who had been done wrong by women.

Then he held up a copy of the book I wrote, and said, "But tonight, I want to talk about a girl now very much in the news, the mysterious girl this book here is dedicated to . . . . "

And when the TV special came on, Delores was in the front room, knitting, and Freddie the Plumber had just come home from work. "Did you have a good day, dear?" she asked sweetly as he came into the room.

"Yes," Freddie the Plumber replied, "I unclogged three drains, two sewers, and four sinks today!"

"Ohhhh, goody," Delores squealed happily, "now you can get me a lot more things! And you just sit down and rest, dear, and I'll fix you a drink while you watch your favorite TV program."

Freddie the Plumber sat down, propping his big messy shoes up on the coffee table, and started watching TV just as TheGreatWriter said, "It seems as though many of our greatest men have suffered at the hands of women and tonight, I hope to shed some light on the character of a mysterious girl now . . . "

"Hey," Freddie the Plumber hollered then, "howcome *Gunsmoke* ain't on?"

And when Delores came rushing in to see what Freddie the Plumber was hollering about, TheGreatWriter was just saying to me, "Would you care to comment on the mysterious girl this book here is dedicated to . . . or is the memory still too painful?"

"I . . . I . . . I," I said then, "I don't have anything to say. She was just a friend. It . . . it . . . it was just somebody I knew once and I made a promise and I . . ."

"Hey," Freddie the Plumber hollered again, "I heard that guy's voice somewheres before!"

Delores held her finger to her lips then, her big blue eyes as round as plums. "Shhhh," she said softly, "listen to what they are saying."

"You must have loved her very much," TheGreat-Writer said, shaking his head sadly when the TV special ended, "and even though the identity of the mysterious girl this book here is dedicated to remains a secret, I'd just like to know one thing! How can she live with herself after this terrible thing she's done?"

And later on when I was in Katzy's book shop, signing copies of the book I wrote for all the people in Hammond, Delores came in too. I *saw* her when she came in. She got in line and waited with all the others, but when her turn came, I just held up my hand, and said, "This book is on me!"

Then I signed it:

To Delores, From a Friend.

And when I handed it to her, I said, "I always buy books and chocolate milk shakes for the people I meet!"

"I've been such a fool," I *heard* Delores say then as she went out the door, "such an utter fool!" □

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the good part

Bed. Kirk and Alison are there most nights together, and afternoons, too, whenever they can get away. Bed. Bed. Squeak of springs and rip of sliding sheets; half hour, hour, time doesn't matter. Only the bed matters.

Interested? Kirk and Alison would be, but they'd skim ahead for the good parts, fingers moist, heavy-breathed, exclaiming and giggling when they found them. So right off we have to decide whose story this is, and if it's theirs we can go ahead and write sylvan descriptions for a while because they'll never be read anyhow; and when we write the good parts we'll put a lot of four-letter words in italics. Kirk and Alison don't like to waste a lot of time looking.

But maybe this isn't their story, and different things might be said. What's our pleasure? Dark psychological trauma? Physical violence? A sad and floral love story? Or are we Kirk, or Alison; is their pleasure ours?

Perhaps we need to know more about Kirk and Alison. She: spread and lax over the mussed sheets, twists of hair all awry, her eyes, yes, veiled, and her wet mouth sucking on a pink peppermint stick and saying

"Kirk, lovey, I'm not the least tired, I'm only now warm. Aren't you coming back to your old momma?" The Southern accent, slight as it is, isn't real. Alison is from Chicago.

He: standing at the window, back all muscled, his small ass curving, valorous in its shape, gallant, tanned. Kirk sunbathes nude. And he says

"I'll be back, sweetpie. I'm just taking a breather. You do me in."

Not very interesting conversationalists, Kirk and Alison; but since theirs is an action story they don't talk much. Their arena is the antique four-poster in Alison's uptown apartment, in a major city, in the Midwest. The wood stretching up for the bed's canopy is sanded and smooth, lovingly oiled and readied, tended by Alison like a rare and fragile something that needs caring to live, stroking to stay up and strong. Some visionary primitive carved it all by hand, filled the backboard with woody scenes of nymphs and satyrs (all with the same expression —he couldn't do faces well) and leaves and daisies and God knows what. It would take weeks and the devotion of an Alison to chart all the patterns in the bed. The wood is cherry, hard to carve. The mattress is straw because Alison finds the sound seductive in a milkmaid way, and she's fond of repeating that at parties. We can picture her there too: tall drink in one thin hand, cigarette in the other, both sharing with the company her swollen mouth. They take turns. The drink wins, for the time being, but later, later the pleasure is all anyone's.

So the bed. To continue, it is lined with satiny sheets and puffed pillows; a setting that Alison seeks, regular as the weather, her element. Floating above her is the canopy, lace-edged and generous, high over her, and just lately, Kirk; a blessing, a sanction, divine.

Alison has a sense of humor. She's ringed her bed with ferny furry plants, leaving an opening for entry — with Venus Flytraps and African violets and broad-leafed vines. The room is a dangerous bower, a room to be tempted and lost in. Her mirror, facing the bed and flat to the wall, has a discreet shade over it, handpainted, decorative. Not everyone, Alison knows, goes for the kinky stuff.

The first time Alison and Kirk met they were on water skis behind separate boats and their ropes tangled. She, bikinied and lifejacketless but not at all helpless, managed to look both frail and athletic at once, both tanned and fragile. Kirk was lost at the sight of her. His muscles, dearly gained, seemed not to matter. He felt his essential weakness. He was afraid. Still, bravely, he smiled his white smile and took her in his veined arms because, as she said, she was drowning, she needed his strength. They treaded the water together, kicking up a foam while they waited for the two boats to angle back. She began to laugh, she couldn't stop laughing, and soon he was awash with laughter too, feeling her legs locked to him, her weight nearly pulling him down. But he laughed, going under not for long.

Back on shore, Kirk's wife, Marie, sat on the dock in her Scotch plaid swimsuit spreading freckle cream on her arms, bored and observant. She knew Kirk for the man he was. She knew he would never leave her, and this sudden event, this Alison, would pass by into another, but Marie would last. Marie knew this; it was her virtue

MARY PETERSON has worked and taught at the University of New Hampshire. Presently she is writing and exploring New England.

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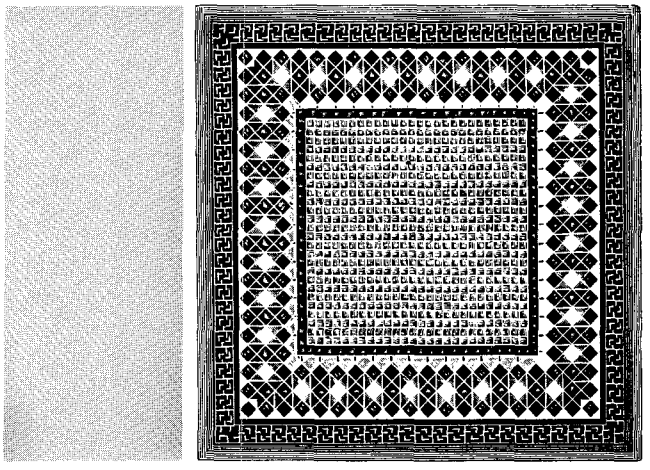
MARY BUNKER PETERSON



and the source of her suffering. Kirk might dally as he would; Marie knew.

Alison's husband, Bill, was off at a sales meeting in Atlanta at the time. He left her often that way; they had, if it must be said, little to say to one another. Sometimes, over breakfast, his soft-boiled egg would squirt a bit yellowing the plate, and it was an embarrassment for him that it should happen with Alison present. She was his love. He was lonely for her even while with her. He needed the knowledge of her, his lawful wife, his reason. He never asked her for anything, and so she stayed with him.

Kirk and Alison, and the bed is waiting. And now Kirk has lighted a stiff cigar, he holds it in his clean teeth, a toughness in his shoulders. What a man he is.

Alison always wished for a man. At thirteen, she wished shamelessly for a man. At fifteen she had found several boys, but no men. She discovered the high school physics teacher then, behind the desk and between the legs one April afternoon when the lilac scent came through the windows maddening them both, and he loved her there like an army; but he was only one man, and she grew tired of him. He wrote her poems. She called them his formulas; and her laughter, he told her, cut through him like a knife. Speaking that way, she said, was not poetic but banal, and she had no more to do with him.

There was no one else worth mentioning until Aaron, and he was the only man Alison ever loved. She was seventeen. It was brief. His family moved away. For all the future, Alison only loved men in whom she saw that or this of Aaron. Kirk himself has Aaron's nose, and therefore his turned back is an irritation to her. She would like to study, again, his dear, familiar nose.

For his part, Kirk always wished for success. It seemed imminent once, floated in the air with the football, scouts on the sidelines and he a receiver running a perfect post pattern, fleet, ready, but the leather slid, slid off and past his fingers. He just missed. Afterward, Coach said, "Tough luck, Barnes." And Kirk said, "Win a few, lose a few," and went to the showers. He didn't believe failure could be so appropriate and so easy, but when he went home the phone did not ring for him. There were, as his father said, no offers forthcoming. Gradually the idea of football slid into his memory, dimmed, and other things gained inside him. For one thing, Donna gained. She was shy and sturdy and competent in the backseat of a '50 Chevy. He needed her and was grateful to her; he was best man at her wedding, smiling among the mums and roses. She kissed him primly in the receiving line. He did not see her again.

By college, Kirk had become known. Women sought him because they had heard things, and he obliged. Then he met Marie, who was not eager. He loved her and married her.

Kirk and Alison, and the bed is waiting.

This afternoon they have left work, she claiming cramps in the tummy; he out, he has said, calling on a contact. His sales total is sagging, he may not make the month's quota, but there is Alison, dusky and luscious for him, waiting, waiting, and reason does not prevail. He arrived at her door, athletic, full in his power, on time, and she let him in.

A long time ago Kirk read a book that recalls himself and Alison, and now he stands absorbed at the window, turning the pages in his mind, wondering what they did next, the stud and the seductress, what new pleasures they chased. He suffers trying to remember it; it had, at the time, been so exciting for him.

Alison studies his back, concludes it is not different, substantially, from other backs she has known, but how the line of the hip is like Aaron's. She wonders how she could have missed that feature of Kirk, and a thin worry line creases her white forehead.

They are a dream, the two of them; lithe, passionate, steam of their bodies changing the atmosphere of the room. They are made for each other. They are a delight for us — for don't we imagine as much, sullen over our desks in our humid offices, ink staining our fingers, dresses and shirts limp, uneasy in the gut after a lunch of French fries and beer? We want to be here, in this rare room, seeing ourselves exotic and hot, perfect and potent and ready.

So now, for us, Kirk moves, he shifts one long leg to turn, and Alison's silky thigh falls aside in anticipation. He hesitates a minute longer, poised at the window, and then he turns, he faces her. Our breath catches. He moves across the room toward her, half-shadowed by the plants, she half-hidden among the pillows. At last, after all these words, at last we can be relieved. Here comes the good part. □

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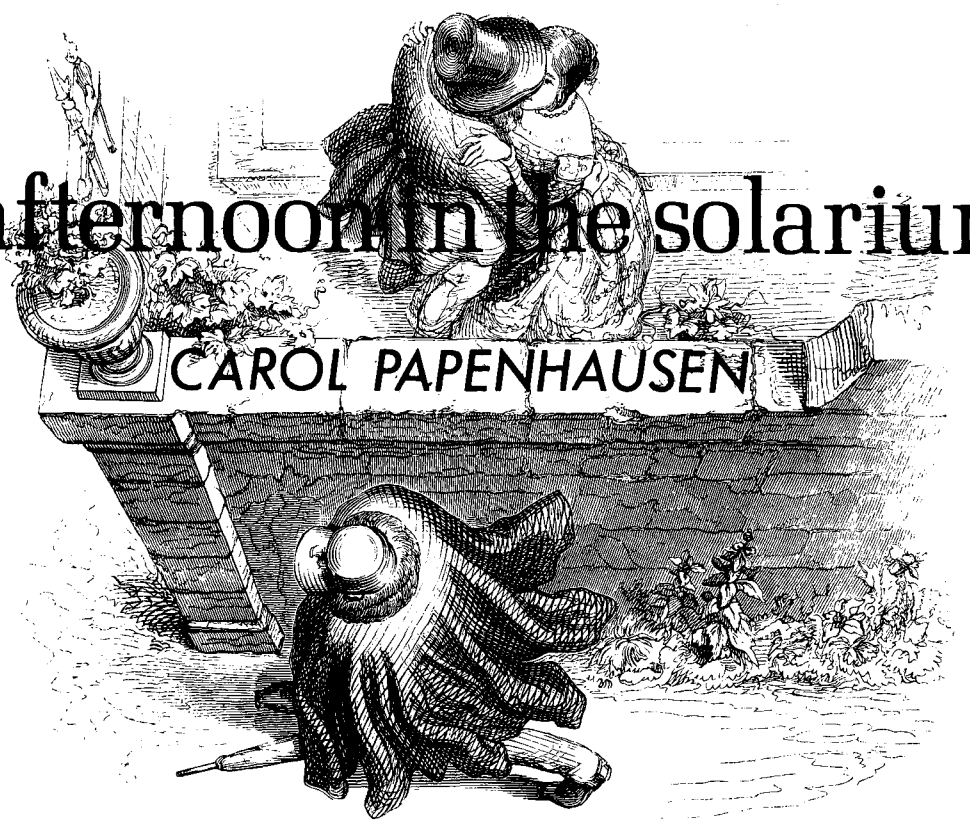
an afternoon in the solarium



CAROL PAPENHAUSEN

He walks into the solarium, in his peculiar rolling gait, as if he owns it, no May I's in his eyes, no hesitation in the forward thrust of his hips. It is my solarium and I own it, but he owns me and, after so many weeks, there is no need to ask permission. Of course he walks that way.

He does not call me anything anymore. We are like lovers that way, speaking names only when someone else is around, when Robert comes in, for instance. There is no "By your leave, Mrs. Harkness," or, "If it's all right, Lucy." But I do not call him anything, either.

The solarium is our room. It was my room and I loved it, sitting there in the golden afternoons and watching the light change the contours and the colors as the sun set. Now it is our room and I watch his contours. Sometimes it is almost dark before I turn on a light and pull the blinds.

"I can hardly see you," he will say from across the room, leaning his body toward me, willing me to answer, but I am afraid to now.

The first time, I said something, not clever, a hint of facetious humility, say it isn't so. I said, "You're not missing anything," very lightly, a little laugh.

And "Ah, Lucy," he said in such a voice that a chill ran down my spine. My name from his lips, in such a voice, purring and yet so sad. He is so young to own a voice like that.

Today he is not waiting for me. All these weeks the expectancy was there; what will happen today, what will I say, what will he say, how long will he stay, will he play or talk, or will we sit in the solarium watching the light change and the room close in until we are alone in the dark? Today he walks in and there is something final about the set of his hips. The end is coming.

"Chopin?" he says.

"If you like." How passive I have become. If you like, whatever you wish. A serf I am, a pull toy. Push me, pull me.

"No," he says and sits down, grimacing.

"Does your hip hurt?" I ask. It was broken three years ago when he was twenty-one, in an automobile accident, and he still limps slightly. That is why he has a peculiar walk. When the weather is damp, he tells me it hurts. But now he shakes his head.

Often we have lunch together—or rather, he has lunch and I watch him eat. I know all his favorite foods and I serve them on our best dishes, even though he never says thank you. Never would I do that for anyone else. Even Peter must say thank you before I serve the next course. Peter learned to say *please* and *thank you* as soon as he could talk because I like those words. Very polite, Peter is. But Glenn never says thank you, and I serve him mushroom soup with sherry and creamed herring and

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CAROL PAPENHAUSEN has a background in journalism and public relations, began free-lancing a few years ago. Her work has appeared in Colorado Quarterly, Prairie Schooner, and Minnesota Review.

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cucumber and sardine sandwiches on pumpernickel bread, and I watch him eat while I drink coffee and smoke a cigarette. When he is finished, I ask him if he would like more and he says no, he is full, but he never says thank you.

"Would you like some lunch?" I say.

He looks at his watch. "It's almost two-thirty," he says.

"A late lunch," I say. "An early tea." He shrugs. I have to coax him into eating his favorite foods. "I have clam chowder," I say.

"All right." He follows me into the kitchen and I can feel his breath on the nape of my neck and I am fainting, reaching for the stove for support, as weak as if recovering from illness. I never look at him while I fix his food, but today he sits at the table, staring at his hands. He is too young to look like that. When I catch my breath, I make small jokes and he smiles politely and reaches for the spoon when I place the soup in front of him, and then looks up at me with lovely sad brown eyes. So young. Only twelve years older than Peter. I pour coffee and light a cigarette, remembering that he was Robert's idea.

Robert always has the ideas; mine are the crumbs, the remains, the tidbits left over after the meal. So Glenn does not have to say thank you. Still —

But I am grateful for the crumbs sometimes. An ad in the paper, Robert calls the number, and they talk. All right, Robert will take piano lessons, once or twice a week, as his schedule permits, because he is a busy man. And, after all, the piano is there and Lucy only tinkles around with it a few times a week, an arpeggio here, a few chords there, and it is too good a piano to only be tinkled upon as Lucy does.

No, I wasn't there when Glenn first came. I'm sure it must have been a shock to Robert to see how young he was, but he is democratic that way, he accepted this twenty-four-year-old boy: Glenn McKay, who rolled into the house on Paris Avenue, charging eight dollars an hour for lessons on Lucy's piano. Did he walk in that first time as if he owned it? I wasn't there.

"Aren't you eating?" Glenn says, tilting his bowl for the last of the chowder, intent on the last fleck of carrot or whatever.

"No." My cigarette has burned down to the filter and I put it out.

"You smoke too much. You're losing weight."

Does he care? Shall I ask, Do you care, Glenn darling? or just, Do you care, Glenn? but he might shrug and retreat into his sad eyes and I would light another cigarette, drawing smoke viciously into my lungs.

Soon business picks up and Robert can no longer afford the time for piano lessons, because companies are crying for new designs, machines that will turn out thousands instead of hundreds an hour, spray tops, precision screws, and Robert cannot sit on a bench and practice scales and bang his way loudly through exercises to show the progress he is making. So little Lucy comes out of the shadows and says shyly, I would like to take lessons, please, and Robert smiles as if he is going to pat me on the head because with Peter gone at school, the little woman has very little to do. Piano lessons. A perfect solution.

But I am in love with the idea of sharing the rosewood bench with the boy who walks peculiarly, who never says thank you. In the shadows, I have been sitting watching him for weeks, his face smiling and grave, pulling back his hair when it falls too far forward. I am the perfect student: I practice, I do what I am told, I am always available and, although sometimes my hands are shaking, my fingers obey me on the keys. He says I am one of his best students.

When he is gone — poking at an aching tooth, salting up a cut finger, I think what I will do when he is gone, because a twenty-four-year-old boy is not going to be around for very long. Take what you have. He comes two or three times a week now and sometimes we do not go near the piano but sit in the next room, the solarium, and watch the light change and darken on the plants and white blinds. He comes to see me, to eat lunch, to tell me of the girl he loves named Laurie who has broken his heart. I listen, I laugh, I am sorry. I do what I can.

Gradually he begins to listen to me, too. Robert and Peter, the Comfort sisters and Mrs. Scone, Robert's father who is dying. I am too young to have a son who is twelve, he tells me. Poor Robert, I say, and he shakes his head disbelievingly. I gather up these crumbs, knowing they will never make a whole loaf, but content with less than half. Not content. I lie. I want it all, declarations, acknowledgements, thrown at my feet.

Something hums between us, sometimes rising, at times barely audible, but it is still less than half a loaf. He does not see Laurie any more. Once he cried, one August, the sun streaming hot through the windows. I had just bathed the plants and they were sweating with droplets, and tears squeezed out of his eyes and I wished he were Peter so I could have held him. Secretly I rejoiced. But now that that bond is broken, nothing holds him here. He is free, he may go any day. Today?

"I forgot crackers," I say, half rising.

"No. I'm not hungry," he says.

My coffee is cold. "Was the soup all right?"

"Fine," he says and nods.

For this I lie awake at night, feeling the hum, waiting for it to subside so I can sleep. At three o'clock I am drinking tea in the kitchen and then I do not get up until eleven. He never comes before one; there is plenty of time.

"How are they today?" he says, half a smile showing me the edges of his perfect teeth.

"Who?"

"Your sisters. The neighbors. The brown baggers."

The Comfort sisters and Mrs. Scone. "Don't you remember their names?" I ask.

"Something strange. Biscuit. Muffin." He shrugs. He cares, he cares not; the petals are running out and there is not enough time to finish counting.

I light another cigarette. "They are fine. I guess. It's

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too dark to see them now." November, the sun sets so early and they rarely make their trips back and forth before six o'clock at night, often much later.

"Didn't you say they had a fight last fall?" he says, his head propped on his hands, his brown eyes devouring me.

"A tiff. A mere tiff. Viola told me. 'A little tiff,' she said."

"But they've made it all up now."

"Yes."

"I'm so glad. Aren't you?" and we laugh and all of his perfect teeth gleam at me. Lovely teeth. I asked him once if they were capped and he was puzzled. Of course not. They have always been perfect.

He takes a sheet of paper from his shirt pocket, unfolds it, lays it on the table between us. "I wrote a poem," he says.

"For me?"

He doesn't answer. He gives me nothing. Once he brought a cartoon he had drawn which made me smile and I asked if I could have it and he said no, it was for a friend. And what am I? I thought perhaps he would bring me another, but he never did. Now another sheet of paper lies between us, half on his side of the line, half on mine. He nudges it over to me. It is called "A Gift of Weeds" and I read it slowly, wondering if I am tantalizing him, hoping he is waiting for my approval, never looking up to see if he is watching.

A walk in the woods
Her arms are filled with stems and shafts
Of dry spikes.
A gift, she says.
A gift of weeds.
But why not flowers? Red and ripe and soft
With life, I ask.
Ah, my love, but flowers die
And weeds are dead forever.

I read it again, wishing I knew if it were good, if I like it. Instead, I fold it in half and crease the edge lightly with my thumb. He takes it from my hands and puts it back in his pocket. I am not to have that, either. Then bring me weeds, I want to say, trash, a stone you pick out of your shoe, a label torn from your Levi's.

"A Renaissance man," I say lightly. "What else do you do?"

Somewhere he is smiling secretly but it doesn't show. "I met a girl today. A clerk in a store. I told her she had a beautiful smile and she said, 'So do you.' I have her phone number." Now the smile is open and his eyes are laughing at me. I get up and take away the empty bowl, running water into it. He stands up, comes beside me, so close the hum becomes a whine, thin and high. Declarations, acknowledgements — I lean across to put the bowl on the counter.

"Let's go into the solarium," he says, as though it were a suggestion, knowing or not knowing it is an order. We go into our room. The sun slants low, beams on the wicker stands, bands of light on the ferns.

We sit in our accustomed places. "Did you like it?" he asks, brushing back his hair. He needs a haircut.

"What?" I say. I am not as good at this game as he is, but I play it anyway.

"The poem."

"I don't know. It's — it's so sad. Isn't it?"

Lucy does not know what she is talking about, his sad and laughing eyes say. "Not that sad," he says and leans back on the wicker chair, his head resting on the flowered cushion but facing me.

I shall get a job when he leaves me. Type in an office, read to the blind, sell jewelry to rich women. Already I am possessed, shopping in my station wagon, my white-wall prison, by the sight of boys loading groceries in the back because sometimes they look like Glenn. Or driving by the college where long-haired boys lounge against balustrades or slouch toward classes. Choking on my middle-aged insanity, I write long letters to Peter at military school and wonder what will happen when he gets older and brings home his friends. Insane. The spectre of the Comfort sisters and Mrs. Scone balances against this new inanity; are there always only two sides to a scale?

"Are you going to call her?" I say.

"Who?"

"The girl with the beautiful smile."

"Oh." Puzzlement passes, but his secret smile shows. "I don't know. Probably." He has so many girls, he doesn't need any more. He tells me all about them, how they call him, their exclamations at his feats, how he has to turn them away. And yet he tells me he doesn't touch, because he is a Scorpio.

I don't touch, he says, and I am not a Scorpio but I don't touch him, either. All those girls, though, all his adventures. I don't touch; that cannot be true, it is something he tells me, for whatever reason. He doesn't talk about Laurie anymore.

There are times when I cannot sleep or when I am trying to wake up, when I feel sorry for him and wonder why. His life is like a hotel room, I think, where things happen — accidents, deaths, conceptions — and yet one never gets to know where the floor creaks at night or exactly where the light switches are before one is gone and someone else moves in. There is nothing permanent in his life. Roommates, girls, students, they are always being switched and interchanged, shuttled about. But is my life better? Should I feel sorry for him?

Permanence I have, the same old enormous house, a husband who calls when he will be late for dinner, a son who comes home every vacation and writes a letter to his father and me every week. Yes, the third step on the second landing creaks and my fingers do not fumble when I enter a dark room. The light goes on instantly. We are both transients in our envy of the other. Pity in the afternoon is laughable. We tell each other how fortunate the other is — free, rooted — and neither of us makes a move to change.

"Shall we play?" I ask. I always ask, even though I am paying. I pay even if we do not play. That sounds like a childish rhyme. Perhaps I should write poetry, too,

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and refuse to give it to anyone. "Shall we play?" I say.

"I learned a new piece," he says, gets up, goes to the piano where I cannot see him. I move to a new chair to watch him.

He plays beautifully. I ache when I look at him at the piano, his hands arching along the keyboard, his feet in their ridiculous boots pressing the pedals. I would give anything to play like he does. He sits back when he is done and smiles at me, stretching his arm toward me.

"Come here," he says and I sit beside him and he shows me what to do and promises he will have the music for me. He never keeps his promises. Never.

I learn the first few measures and he gets up. Is it time to go? Our shadows are long on the carpet, but Robert won't be home for an hour or so, unless he calls. He might call. He is very good about letting me know and he always keeps his promises.

No, we are back in the solarium. I am like a kitten tied to the end of a string, led here, taken there, without enough strength to gnaw through the collar or even bite the hand that leads it, given crumbs for sustenance and hoping no one will set me free. Insanity.

"Ah, they're early today, aren't they?" Glenn says, staring out the window, his body twisted around on the wicker love seat, faded jeans taut across his legs.

"Who is it?"

"I don't know. I can't tell them apart. They all look alike," and he turns around to wink at me. The wink says, All women look alike to me, or, What do I care about these things anyway? or, Come sit beside me and see. Bewitched, I kneel next to him on the love seat and, for a moment, the full round disc of the setting sun blinds me.

Then "Violet," I say. "That's Violet." Less like a violet than anything I can think of, she clumps her way across the street carrying her brown bag and a purse that once may have been black.

"Do they have lots of money?" Glenn says dreamily. "Piles and pyramids of money?" then looks at me earnestly. He is obsessed by money. If he ever had any, I think he would be a miser. He has no scruples about taking it; what he would like is a patron.

Violet Comfort would be a very bad patron. "They do. It's all in trusts, though. Mrs. Mutton is one of the genteel poor," I say. The Comfort sisters, Violet and Amelia, live next door, in an old brick house with a carriage house in the back where they keep the cars they seldom drive. Mrs. Mutton — her name is Ollie — Olivia? Olga? — is across from us. The three of them speak only to each other, except when they have had a fight. A little tiff. Then sometimes they will talk to me, if we are in our yards at the same time.

We watch Violet stand at Mrs. Mutton's door, her rolled brown bag wrapped in her arm. "That's what I'll be like in a few years," I say lightly. "Old and a little mad, with wisps of gray hair falling around my face. And I shall refuse to drink my friends' liquor, but bring my own." In the daylight, with him sitting there next to me, I can say this lightly, but in the dark of the night, in the black marrow of three a.m., I clench my teeth and cry out against the spirits of the Comfort sisters and Mrs. Mutton, never! Never!

"And does Mrs. Mutton bring her bottle when she visits next door?" Glenn says, and I nod.

"Of course. She likes Johnny Walker. Says the stuff they drink tastes like wood alcohol," and smiling together, we watch out the window until Violet and her bag of cheap bourbon are admitted to Mrs. Mutton's green-gabled house.

He gets up restlessly and goes into the library to play, while I watch the flaming disc cool and turn colors as it starts to set. The plants around me do not move; perfect and green, they look artificial, too perfect. I am longing for a little mold or fungus so that I may exorcise their blight.

In the shadows, Glenn comes back. "I wrote that," he says.

"It was very good." I wish I had listened better. "You are wasting your time giving lessons. You should be playing, composing."

"I know." He sprawls into a chair, half of his body in shadow. "I'm going away," he says abruptly.

Of course. Of course he is. "Where?"

"I don't know. New Hampshire first. To see my father. Then — somewhere."

"Oh." I shall get a job, type in an office, read to the blind — the front door slams, too early, and Robert's cheery "halloo" sings through the house. It is too late now for anything, acknowledgements, declarations.

Springing up, Glenn says, "I'll say goodbye to Robert," and leaves me in the solarium. Voices in the hall, the front room. The hanging baskets of plants make long shadows on the matting and the walls. Only one light shows in the Mutton house. Will he say goodbye to me? Too late for anything else.

"Goodbye," he says from the doorway and I rise and he meets me halfway. "Goodbye," he says again, more gently, and then, "Thank you," very softly. He still does not touch me.

"You're welcome." I give a formal sort of curtsey and he smiles, holds out his hands for a minute, but can find nothing to say and turns away.

"Good luck," I call after him, because that is what one calls out to the departed and the departing, but he is gone into the black shadows of our large old house on Paris Avenue. Across the street, the light shines in the Mutton house, but I do not want to answer it with mine.

In a few minutes I will make dinner. Perhaps tonight I will go shopping, circling warily among those slouching, sad-eyed young men who crowd the shopping centers with their boots and blue jeans and peach-cheeked young girls. In a few years, Peter will bring home his friends and I will stare at them, trying not to embarrass anyone. In a few minutes, I will be an old lady, and it will be too late.

I do not see him leave because my eyes are closed, but I am not crying. In a few minutes, I will be too old to cry. □

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Kathryn Young

LEFTOVERS

1
HANDLE WITH CARE

He is five."

The lady pushes tortoise sunglasses down to the tip of her nose, and, with a steady gaze now, replies: I'm certainly happy to know all this. But are you absolutely sure you don't want to save it for later? I mean, what has it been, six, seven months? No! I'll tell you what. Let's save the rest until the ninth month and then you can tell me all the wonderfully hideous details and—don't you see?—we can pretend this is our very own, darling son. Puft. Five years old.

She regrets. When angry she chooses words without care and to her dismay they come tumbling forth in a surge, wild. She'd like another chance. Tell me again, you have a son. I must meet him, of course. Come for lunch this Saturday. Patience. He has an animal, a pet, well the dog must come too, then. Understanding. I look forward to it. I accept, I accept.

Saturday morning. Anne Claiborne rose at the disgraceful hour of seven a.m. It had been a bad night, full of wall shadows and hot, oppressive blankets. The first thing she did upon arising was to throw open every window in the bedroom and cleanse the restlessness away with the fog. She stood in the path of cool air and let the mist settle on her face, her nightgown. The child will be like his father, no doubt. Strong willed and sinewy armed and eyes that never fail to betray him. I can read those eyes; they are my security.

She moved from the window to the closet and began a systematic journey through her entire wardrobe, through the few leftover remnants of school to the collection of dark, tailored skirts and fitted blouses. This lusterless costume became her uniform, a source of comfort, a modulated definition of some internal region she was unable to verbalize or, perhaps, never cared to. But today. Children like bright colors, they prefer disguises—don't they?—clumsy hats and lime greens and the kind of pinks that give one headaches and stripes as wide as the sky and sparkling circles and dots. They think distraction is pretty. Will he think me quite an old woman in my clothes which were never meant to dazzle the abyss-like eyes of a child? Will he see? I must test him.

She made coffee and carried her mug to the back porch. The plants needed tending. She was grateful for their need, the powdery soil, the dusty leaves, the clutter. To spite her, he brought a gift one day, a small cactus so withered and prunelike that he had laughed at her expression when she unwrapped the stunted, prickly growth.

"But it's nearly completely self sufficient," he had said. "You hardly have to water it. I think it looks wonderfully inferior next to these other plants of yours. Distinctly so."

KATHRYN YOUNG has returned to her home in Berkeley after an experimental exile in the Midwest.

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In late October, when signs of winter leave feathery icings on the window sills, Anne moves her plants into the house. Some of them flourish in the artificial heating system—the ferns and the wandering ivys always seem to adapt—but every year she must make a valiant attempt at salvaging those that thrive on sunshine. Little blue vials of magic formula are especially concocted by her horticulturist; she sets them up in a wooden beaker stand in the kitchen. On weekends she walks through her plant forest, or *jungle* as Richard refers to it, and gives each one a dose of the blue chemical. All except for the cactus, for, suprisingly, it kept up its own strength and grew plumper and more fibrous every day.

From across the neighbor's yard sounds of cello practicing wafted through the screen door. The scales began exactly at ten, as they always did; the lumbering progression of notes rose and fell, ascending and descending in rhythmic pattern, swelling and diminishing until the cadence. The musician was a student, a girl so like Anne in her college days—hollow cheeked, with a jagged shock of chestnut hair, hair that always conformed in a wayward fashion to the forces of nature. She would watch the girl toting the absurd instrument, two angular figures headed toward some unknown destination with the same look of expectancy, the same buoyant energy she had once possessed. She remembered her own passion: she had wanted to become an opera singer, a famous diva travelling from city to city, feasting in posh restaurants and reveling in critical acclaim. In college she would arrive at rehearsals slightly breathless, hair windblown, two dark slashes of color across her cheeks, eyes bright with anticipation. Her voice became her identity—the clear, bell-like quality, the practiced control. After graduation she worked alone on the interminable exercises, the breathing technique, the exaggerated vowel sounds, the French diction. But gradually it became more and more difficult to come to the piano, to begin. She would put it off an hour, and then whole days, weeks, and finally altogether. Reams of printed sheet music lay in the piano bench—she would not give them up—and they parched and yellowed. Now when the girl student passed by the window, scarves flying, book satchel swinging with the brisk rhythm of her gait, Anne would quickly look up, as if to catch sight of the young girl somehow preserved the memory of a long-ago portrait of herself.

At the age of twenty-seven, with two rather bland affairs behind her and a succession of dreary jobs, she was now a script girl at the studio where she had first met Richard. He was an actor, divorced, ten years her senior. He liked her strange ways, her bizarre devotion to every sort of vegetation, her gamin expression. She found the age difference reassuring. And it was all very fine until he had uttered those words which she still didn't quite believe: *I have a son. He is five.*

A child. She was not on familiar ground. Children. She saw them at the supermarket, their graspy little hands pulling and tugging at their distraught mothers, and in the park where their voices intermingled with overtones of shrieking and crying, savage in their insistence. He will be different. Round, solemn eyes and the blackest hair, the color of huckleberry, and he will be terribly precocious and attentive. He will grow to depend on me.

Richard rarely mentioned his ex-wife, and when he did it was always some fragmented remark, an opaque glimpse into his buried marriage. She gathered, from the bits and pieces she managed to construe, that her name was Jennifer, that she spent the better part of the day at her potter's wheel endlessly spinning off crockery to show at her sales, that she read a great deal and cherished the work of Barthelme and most of the Victorian novelists. She seemed thoroughly likeable. A lady potter spinning off her wares for market. If Richard could only mention something despicable about her, some tidy little tidbit she could magnify to gross extremes within her mind. Just for reassurance.

They came before noon. A spindly legged child bounded up the front porch and rang the bell. His comrade, a badger-faced canine ambled up the path at his own leisure, sniffing and pawing at the ground as he traversed the new territory. She opened the screen door.

"Why, hello there."

The boy looked up. "Are you the plant lady?"

He stood in the doorway and the flickering light from the sun made dancing patterns in his hair, his fine, brown hair. His eyes are blue, they are blue and have that startled quality. And his arms are so frail.

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"Daddy, is that the plant lady?" he insisted.

"I'm Anne. What's your name and can you introduce me to your friend here?" She pointed at the dog.

"I'm Philip, and this is Simon."

Richard placed a cardboard box at the foot of the porch. It was filled with earthenware crockery of varying shapes and sizes, all carefully arranged in a neat progression, large to small.

"They're from Jenny," he said. "She thought you might be able to use them. For your plants."

She was momentarily stunned. A gift from the lady potter to the plant lady.

"Tell her thank you." Thank you so very much, Jennifer. And will you give me another portion of your life tomorrow, maybe the following day, or next week perhaps? There's no hurry, of course. You have such a great deal. And I will care for whatever you choose to relinquish, please be assured.

The child and his dog foraged through the house with the eagerness of two novice explorers. They discovered all sorts of treasures, a cache of antique watering cans, a string of homemade candles, a box of chocolate raisins. He found the patio, overwhelmingly endowed with foliage, a magnificent sight. He liked the ferns, for they reminded him of the massive sails on a boat, but he took particular interest in the cactus placed conspicuously, like a wound, in the center of the lush, potted garden. She watched him fingering and estimating the degree of pain in each of the prickly needles until she finally said,

"Take it. Take it home with you."

At twelve, she covered the kitchen table with a cloth and served lunch, an oyster gray chowder sprinkled with tiny crackers shaped like fish. They talked about the western in which Richard was about to appear, the bad guy with high spurred boots and a black hat. He wasn't particularly happy, but he needed the money and when the part was offered it seemed wise to accept. The child ate slowly; he chewed methodically and his eyes seemed to devour more than what he put into his mouth. He does not even eat like his father. And later, as if prompted by some phantom cue, as though the time of her rehearsal had terminated, she made a quiet suggestion; Perhaps we can all go to the park after lunch. But—

"No, we're going to the zoo," the boy merely said.

She looked at Richard from across the table. He does not even see. This child is wiser than the both of us, he has the knowledge, the clarified, blue-eyed insight spun from the wheel of the artist mother.

When they left, she watched the car drive away from the kitchen window. They were in a hurry, they left in a rush—dog barking furiously, child racing to the car. She walked to the porch and sat with her plants, their quiet, murmuring voices, their rustling green leaves, the comfort of their presence. He had forgotten the cactus. He was thoughtless. Thoughtless. As children sometimes are. □

2
THE SOOTHSAYER

If she held the cigarette at a certain angle she could flick the ashes over the side of the ship, fashion her own personal fireworks of orange sparks. And after all, it did provide something to look at besides her sister's vapid face, that gargoyle-looking smile stretched tightly from ear to ear. What a face of discomfort held together by those deceptive little muscles. You have trained them well, I must admit, but that grin is just a bit too crisp around the edges, don't you think? Pumpkin-like. Too easily broken. I won't tell though, Bernice, for I can be trusted, whereas you cannot.

Emily had had an unfortunate childhood. She was not beaten nor unduly chastised like Bernice, who was given to tossing saucy remarks and whose impertinence grew to the art of a nimble-tongued serpent. No, her childhood was simply, remarkably drab. They tried; oh, but didn't they— With that pensive flower of a face, that compact, svelte body, *you* could be a dancer. You *must* be a dancer. So mother drove her, drove her, drove her to the ballet lessons. Bernice would stay home and play house with friends, spindly-legged girls with jellybean stained lips, and she would force them to drink unsweetened Kool-Aid against their will. While Emily went through the routine of gangly arabesques and squat-like pliés which she never felt entirely comfortable doing—they always seemed rather obscene—Bernice acquired the subtle techniques of survival on the terra cotta patio of their own backyard.

On Sunday mornings, when the mother lay sprawled on the queen sized bed, a papaya facial mask globbed and receding into every middle-aged crease of her face, Emily began her weekly ritual. On these mornings, the house would be hollow sounding; the objects in the rooms

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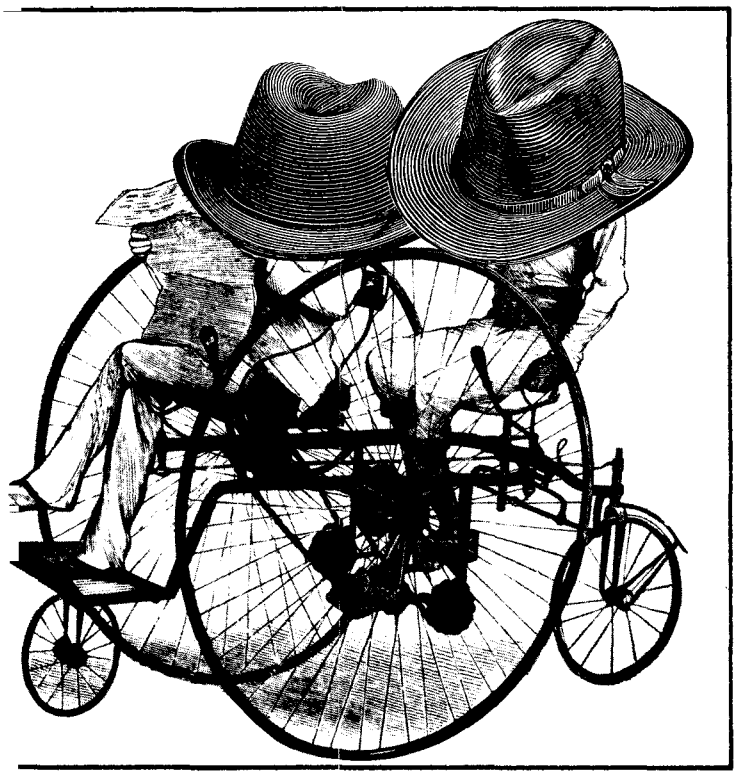

seemed to give off their own energy, and each footstep made resounding taps as she made her way to the kitchen door and out into the street. Ribbed kneesocks framed two jutting, angular knobs, a cast-off Givenchy scarf made flaying movements in the wind, snapping around her head. She had an aversion to stepping on fallen leaves, those orange-red hands segmented by brown veins, so with trepidation she carefully maneuvered her steps to a delicate, patterned walk. From afar it seemed whimsical: A gaunt figure on an imaginary journey, to where? To the library. And to one particular Horowitz recording. She would listen to an entire cut in order to hear the applause; she knew exactly when to turn up the volume, the precise moment when the tumultuous clamor, those surging waves of approval, came roaring through the earphones. As many times as she heard the work, she could never quite reconstruct the melody, the dominant theme; even walking home from the library, she could not recall. But the applause lingered and, sometimes, at night, the deafening roar merged with her solitude, penetrating the opacity of her room.

And so on. All the damp-cheeked yearnings of adolescence rose within her. They dangled before her, each longing a prism shimmering deceptively as it revolved in mid-air, its sharp edges glistening. She fled to the sanctity of the illusory, for it ran like salve over those daily betrayals. Her mother took her temperature, plunged her into steaming tubfuls of water, initiated a multitude of therapies: extravagant shopping ventures and high caloric lunches, comfort foods—whipped cream, ice cream, creamed chicken, cream puffs. Be jubilant, mother insisted. Go out, she'd demand as Emily grew older, prodding her out the door with some fuzzy-tongued boy plagued with a glorious technicolor case of rampant acne. On these occasions she would have to carefully paint in every part of her daughter's face. Toffee rose lipstick. Make the corners of your mouth turn upward, that's right, straight up to the clouds. Come on now and give us some sparkle. Try harder, Emily. Try.

Father stepped in when it became all too apparent that Emily wasn't blossoming into the Sugarplum Fairy. (Mother watched limply from the wings and saw her Margot Fonteyn dreams sinking slowly into the west—her Emily the eternal Rhinemaiden in extravagant Wagnerian efforts adapted to dance). Florid-cheeked, with a dense crop of sable hair, he brought home a stack of vari-sized college catalogues. She pored through their contents, all of them padded with promises: We are it, we guarantee a valuable experience, to broaden, to stimulate, to expand, for your money, for your money. What prompted her finally to choose the small, eastern college was not so much the excellent faculty, the renowned conglomerate of visiting lecturers, but the inside cover of the catalogue, a five-by-ten print of a single tree in bloom. A massing of polished leaves encircled by a thicket of shrubs. Her chaste sapling.

College sped through her consciousness; she was there, and yet she was not. The ivy-covered buildings, the burgeoning, carefully manicured vegetation, that smug-faced campanile, students moving somnolently to class with frayed notebooks tucked under an arm; she watched it all loom and recede as though she were captive in a kaleidoscope. To each season she adapted. When winter left a quilt of white over the landscape, she would shield herself with an armor of heavy woollens, crocheted stocking caps, boots that made crunching noises in the snow. Sometimes an abrupt squall came thrashing through the town. Streetlamps blinked on and off, hesitantly, weakly, and often the storms induced a complete blackout. Looking out her window into the sooty darkness, she never felt more protected. But on dreary days when it was not really winter, had no precise definition, when the trees were halfway clothed in bedraggled leaves, an empty space, a void rose within her. Alone in her room she made every effort to fill that space, frantically composing sheet after sheet of poems, villanelles. Though the words were her own, she never failed to feel estranged from the stark, typewritten letters staring up at her.

In the cold air, in the warm sunshine of a fall afternoon: they met before a pile of dead leaves. He was tall, and slender, and self-assured. He imposed, he mocked, he dared her out of the corner of his eye. She sat rather bewildered, trying to conjure up pithy phrases, but they stuck like peanut butter to the roof of her mouth. Her hair hung in fat braids, and it was as though they were two paint-brushes, which, if she cared to, could merely sweep away the scene with one quick stroke each. But she was too curious. And then what happened? she wanted to know. He said, I am a dark-eyed marvel from an exotic land, can you guess which one? She couldn't really. I'll give you a hint, he taunted. Turbans, camels,

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rugs. Ah yes, she nodded, pretending to know. It is that liver-shaped land between here and there, am I not correct? Later, when she knew for sure, she looked it up in the tiny atlas at the back of her little green book, A Daily Reminder of Important Matters. A tiny country lodged between two big ones, two vast purple lands, one yellow, one green. A sometimes arid, frequently blizzard-ridden, all the time mountainous point of beginning and departure. To Emily, the names of his cities, those mystical, multi-syllabled tongue twisters, seemed more like the names of sorcerers, witches or warlocks. How could it be? In the *National Geographic,* craggy-faced, emaciated men peered from the glossy pages. Rising tempests of dust, soil the color of bisque. There must be some mistake. I see no trace of you in these honest faces.

She kicked off her sandals and began swishing her feet through the dried leaves, but so carefully, always the savior of lovely dead things. What's your sign? he asked. Here it is. It was such a bore, two scales of perfect balance, and whatever are they weighing anyway? Is this your system of judging, sir? He: You know, your hair is really much too lovely to be bound up like a squaw's. Do you suppose you might unravel it one of these days? And listen, I've always had this social affliction. Can't talk to anyone when they're on my left. She mused awhile; well, I can't talk to anyone when they're on my right. (Premonition number one. He can't talk, she can't talk, they can't talk.) In the beginning. The first weeks were filled with clever chatter, carefully measured dialogue. Verbal warfare came with the change of the seasons from autumn to winter. She was betrayed by her own sense of comfort. What is it with you, Emily, are you some sort of masochist? Do you dislike yourself so much? (Only when you ask.) Don't play games with me. (Please understand, I don't want to be equal. I want to be superior.) I suppose you became involved to gather material for your poems, am I not correct? (Unfair, unfair.)

Let me begin again, please. It didn't turn out right—and doesn't a silly girl deserve a second chance? No. He didn't have the decency even to stop eating when he calmly informed her: Would you believe me if I told you I have no feeling for or against the situation? Meaning you, Emily. You are the situation and you are being blown like fine dust across the desert of his perfectly defined life. But you can't say that, she thought. You're just too late this time. Rhett Butler already made that crystal clear to foolish hearts all over the country. *My dear, I simply don't give a damn.* We who have struggled against redundancies. And now this.

Four days later, a Thursday afternoon. A counselor's office, so full of arty wooded objects that it looked like it was straight out of a catalogue of Creative Playthings. Deep amber curtains, a small table with a tissue box and eyedrops, a picture of a young man, an arrogant curl to his lip. What do you think of that? he asked. Tentatively now, let this be right—I don't like it. He seemed pleased; I don't either. (Then why . . . ?) It seems to me . . . in your relationships . . . defined them before they've even developed . . . do you see . . . boat without oars . . . one day at a time . . . to be . . . content; not even happy, so hysterical, you know . . . Do you see? You see. And as he walked her to the door: Just remember, once we have made a decision, even if that decision is to make no decision at all, we have come one step further in taking control of our emotions. There is an exaltation in our survival.

It was, however, momentary, for the lady came down hard and fast. Right into the arms of mother and father who promptly sent her packing on a therapeutic journey. Travel is so broadening, water is so comforting. All of them, mother; your creases are becoming wonderfully distinct, father; my, how hair flies! and Bernice, aren't you looking smug today. I can't begin to tell you how becoming it is.

And everything was perfect. The passengers demanded perfection. We have paid our $750; now look, please deceive us. The oily-planked deck was diligently scrubbed, the tropical drinks were served in towering glasses by slim-hipped Italian men. On deck, the people spoke in hushed tones, whispers, when if they chose to they could bellow and wail to their hearts' content. There was no one to hear, only the miles of sea—and it had its own defense; it could roar right back.

After a week of wandering from one end of the ship to the other, Emily staked out her own territory, as everyone else had. A reclining chair, a blanket, her private portion of the ocean.

"Anyone sitting here?"

A girl, anywhere between that anonymous chasm of time, 23, 26, 28; sunburned, hair pulled back in a pony tail. Emily shook her head.

" 'Cause if not, I plan to spend the day right here. Hiding. My kids driving me up the wall, Clifford off to play pool, and I've just about had it."

She plopped herself down and plunged into an involved discourse on her suburban life in sunny San Diego. Palm trees, massive shopping centers, the most terrific highway system, fresh lobsters that haven't been frozen into a goggle-eyed stupor. And then, she asked her. Got any kids, honey?

I can't possibly look old enough for that, can I? Not yet. It's just that I'm tired and get that crepy look under the eyes and sometimes, even at my tender age, sometimes I actually have to use concealing cream to block out those purple shadows. Isn't it incredible, though; I mean, I haven't even graduated from college.

For one fleeting moment, she wanted to withdraw the picture of herself, a twenty-year-old baby picture, a gurgling, chubby-limbed testament to her past. But she didn't. She excused herself, climbed the stairs to the upper deck, and stood by the railing. Define your sense of freedom. Once we have made a decision, one step. The conditions, though: the stage must be properly set, perhaps tomorrow; wait for an easterly wind, a frothy display of whitecaps, a shrieking audience of seagulls. She looked down and thought she saw, for an instant, her face, rising shining and dark from the water. □

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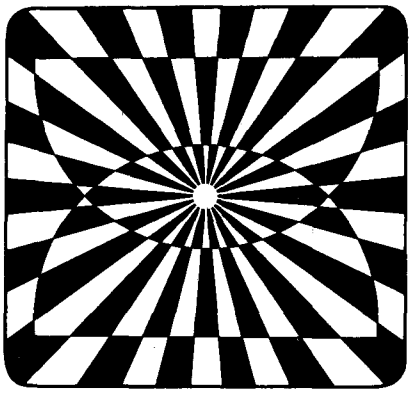
The Saint of Illusion



Kent Nelson

Darkness was already down. The three roommates sat in the living room.

"Leader has a burr in his soul," Kobala said, opening a beer and putting it on the table without taking a sip.

"Something's got a hold of him all right," Willie agreed. "It's almost scary to take a look at him."

They both turned toward Reese, Leader's brother, for an explanation. But he could not give one. "Don't ask me," he said. "I don't know any more about him than anyone else."

"I've never seen a human being look so wasted," Willie said.

"He's in transition." Reese took up the opened beer and drank from it. "You know the age. He'll come out of it."

Kobala was more reserved. He appeared to be constantly assessing a room, as if to determine the next course of action. His mannerisms were always slow and considered, like an ancient Confucian. "Maybe Leader is victimized by his illusions," he said.

Reese sighed. "I've tried to tell him what I've done. What we've all done. But he won't listen. He wasn't always this way. No, he wasn't. There was the divorce in our family and things split up. But I've never seen him like he was yesterday."

The day before, Leader had come in from the road. He had driven a creaky old Hudson across the vast reaches of the country, and without money or the prospect of money, he had landed at his brother's doorstep, just as the car gave out. Reese had hardly recognized him. Leader was thinner and seemed taller; he was in a wild state. In the way he talked he was almost incoherent, like a man lost in the perspective of time and place. He couldn't remember things.

Reese asked him where he'd been. "I just can't remember where, really," Leader said. "I was so many places."

"But how can you not remember where you've been?"

"I was everywhere. Every nook and cranny of the country."

"Well, then, how did you find your way back here?"

"You don't forget where you were born," Leader had said.

Reese took up Kobala's beer again. "Like now," he said. "Where do you think he is now?"

No one knew.

Kobala looked up without moving his head. "What is he going to do while he's here?"

"He'll need a job," Reese said.

"If he stays," Willie put in, "I think it's fair that he pay a share. None of us cares if he lives here, but we're not rich yet either."

"He can steal for a living," Kobala said. "From the looks of his innocence he could get away with it."

Reese shook his head. "Leader couldn't steal a bottle cap off the pavement."

"What about the car?" Willie asked.

"It will sit," Reese predicted. "I bet that car won't run again ever."

Just then Leader came in. A cold whip of wind came

KENT NELSON is a hot literary property, with stories recently in SEWANEE REVIEW, MICHIGAN QUARTERLY, TRANSATLANTIC REVIEW, *etc., etc., not to mention the NAR. He grew up in Colorado, now lives in South Carolina.*

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through the open door with him, and Leader stood for a moment looking around the room. His pants were soaked to the knees, and his jacket had almost been torn off. His sandy hair had bits of yellow grass and leaves tangled in it, but he gave everyone a smile.

"Where in the hell were you?" Reese asked.

"Out looking."

"Close the door," Willie shouted.

Leader came in and closed the door. He took off his muddy shoes.

"What're you looking for after dark? Where?"

"I know my way around," Leader said.

"You been in the swamp. Smell him," Willie said. "He's been in swamp mud."

Leader came in and stood near Kobala. "A lot quieter out in the swamp than in here," he said.

Reese shook his head. "We were just talking," Reese said, getting to an important subject. "Listen, Willie's a reporter. Maybe he can get you a job down at the *News*."

Willie took it up. "You ought to pay a share if you're going to stay long. I might be able to line up something if you'd tell me what you like to do on a newspaper."

"Nothing," Leader said.

"There aren't any reporting jobs," Reese said. "They've all been taken up by bright young men who started when they should have started. But maybe Willie could get you into the shop."

"I don't want to be a bright young man," Leader said.

A silence came over the room. No one knew exactly what to say to Leader. He was such a foreign person, a stranger who at eighteen seemed both child-like and ancient. Sometimes he was gloomy, but sometimes a brightness would radiate from him, as if a thought had suddenly struck him and cast him in brilliant colors.

Reese broke the silence. "Leader, can I say something?"

"I don't know."

"It's time you got started somewhere."

"I've only been here a day," Leader said.

"I mean with something serious. You haven't been to college and it doesn't look as though you're going. You've been traipsing around the country for months without even knowing where you've been. You can't do that forever."

"Why?"

Reese ignored the question. "What are you going to do here?"

"Work on the car."

"How? You haven't got any parts, and you haven't got any money to buy them."

"I'll be busy," Leader said.

"Like today? You've been walking through that mudhole."

"He wasn't really in the swamp," Willie said. "Nobody'd go in there. He got splashed by a car."

Kobala held up his hand. "What's in the swamp?" he asked Leader very seriously.

Leader turned to him slowly. He had that brightness of brilliant colors.

"There's nothing in the swamp," Reese interrupted. "Let's get to the issue. What about it, Willie? Can you get him a job as a typesetter or something?"

Kobala smiled. "He couldn't do it anyway," he observed. "He would need a union card."

Leader did get a job. The new superhighway had cut out the traffic on old Route 24, and the businesses along the old road were folding. A diner advertised for a night short order cook to stay open twenty-four hours and draw in the through night people. Leader had no trouble being hired.

He worked ten at night to five in the morning. In the evenings he hitched out, and in the mornings, tired but still alert, he walked the six miles back to the house.

He walked the roundabout way through the woods, along the trails he used to know when he was little. But it was different now. Too many people had come through those woods, too many houses built too nearby. By the time he got home every day he had collected a gunny sackful of trash.

Reese and Willie were always gone when he arrived. Reese was a real estate man with regular hours, and Willie was an ambitious man for the evening paper. But Kobala was often there.

Kobala played the flute as back-up in a club. He had strange hours and his habits were odd. Sometimes when Leader got back he would hear Kobala playing his flute in the stillness of the house, and on those mornings he would wait at a window, listening and not letting Kobala know he was there.

But other mornings when he did not hear the flute, he would go immediately to the Hudson and dump the sackful of trash inside.

"You collect that stuff?" Willie asked, one evening.

"Yes."

"What you going to do with it? Sell it?"

"I'm just collecting it."

Reese came in. He had put on a clean shirt and had combed his hair with a spray. "Maybe he's looking for a part for his car. Going to rebuild the body with tin cans." He turned to Willie. "Come on, man. We'll be late."

"What'll he do for a flat tire?" Willie asked, laughing. He went to change.

"You'll see," Leader said.

Reese put on a jacket, and straightened his shirt collar out over the lapel. "They got any good ones at the diner?" he asked.

"Any good whats?"

"I mean, who comes into that place? You got any girls?"

Leader smiled. He liked the people who came in. They were road people or night people, truckers or telephone operators or bar girls. And there was one in particular he liked.

"What's her name?" Kobala asked.

"Felicia," Leader said.

Willie came back, clean and neat, from the bathroom.

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"Anytime you want to bring her here," Willie said, "we'll stay out of the way."

Leader looked sheepish. "I wouldn't be able to bring her here."

"Maybe take her down to the swamp," Reese said. "Come on, Willie. Let's go have some fun."

They went out and Kobala and Leader sat for a few minutes in silence.

"You think you'll get the car fixed?" Kobala said.

"I have to," Leader said brightly. He had a kind of magic in his eyes.

"Why is that?"

A faint smile crossed Leader's face. "Because my saint lives in the old Hudson," he said. "I'd do it for him."

"And if you get it fixed," Kobala went on without a pause, "where would you go?"

Leader shook his head. It was not a question he could answer, just as he could not tell what it was like to be dead. He knew life and not death, and so he knew his feelings. He knew it was not wanderlust that he had, nor was he conscious of seeking something. But he was in constant motion, steering like a migrating bird toward some land in the distance that he could not see, knowing only through instinct that it was there to reach.

"You have what you need here," Kobala said after a moment. "Maybe you'd better stay."

"You know better than that," Leader said.

Leader was friendly to everyone with a sad story. He might have been a great politician, but he was no one at all. He had no purpose, no foresight, and no ambition. It did not matter to him that the diner was broken down and out in the country. He liked to serve people meals, and the people came. The diner did more business at night as the word spread than it did during the daylight hours.

When Reese heard how well the diner was doing, he took Leader aside to the window. "Listen," he said, "why don't you open up a place of your own?"

That day had not been like others for Leader. He had not slept at all. That morning after work, in the light of the sunrise, he had taken Felicia out to show her what he had done. The spring leaves sparkled in color, the shafts of light angling down through the leaves. What had seemed to him such a desolate place months before when he had walked the junky trails now seemed new. He had rescued that place for himself. He had taken away the litter, and now he enjoyed it with Felicia.

"No money," Leader said.

"I'll put up some capital."

"I don't have the business sense."

"Of course you've got it. Everyone's heard about the night diner. I can keep the books if you don't know how."

Leader looked out over the yard. And then when he had walked back, he found no one at home. Even Kobala had not come home the night before, and right away he had begun to work on the old Hudson. He worked without a shirt on, his thin arms and chest covered with grease. He cleaned the carburetor, changed a tire, rewired the ignition, replaced the old bearings. And it had run.

"You're not going to let me give any excuses, are you?" Leader asked.

Reese looked at him sadly. "Leader, you can do it. But you don't want to face anything. You're an escapist."

Then Kobala started playing the flute in the next room. The sounds circled the house; the air seemed to glide and Leader's expression changed.

He had driven the Hudson out onto the open road, not onto the superhighway, but along the small roads between small towns. He got it up to forty-five where he always drove, and it kept on and on. He opened all the windows and let the wind come through, and he started yelling in excitement like a crazy man. The trees flowed past, the road kept unrolling in front of him, and he looked upon the open country and the distance.

"Why am I any more of an escapist than you?"

"Because you haven't done anything," Reese told him, raising his voice. "I'm giving you a chance, and you still don't want to do anything."

"And what have you done?"

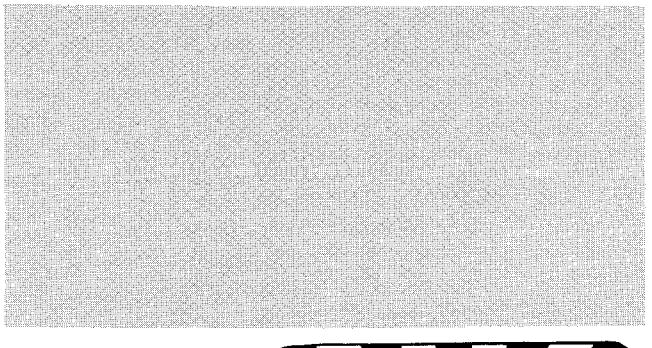
"Sold some land, and made some money."

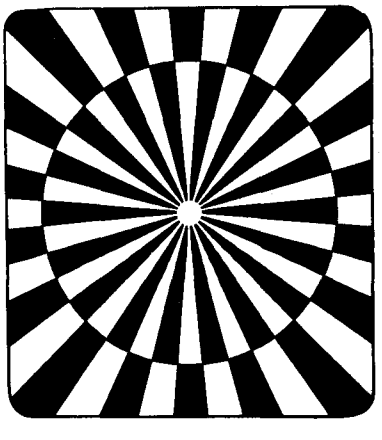
Kobala stopped abruptly with the loud voices. The silence strained, and slowly he came in. "Leader's right," he said. "What more have any of us done?"

"We keep ourselves," Willie said.

"He keeps us," Kobala answered. "He's reclaimed the woods and he knows more than we'll ever know."

He walked over to the window, his heavy body silent on the floor. "I look out and see . . . a street. There's a light on the corner and some cars parked along the curb under some trees. Do you think he sees the same things





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out there that I see?"

"Of course he does," Reese said.

Reese and Willie turned to Leader. Kobala kept his gaze out the window.

"I see the same things," Leader said, "but there are whispers and shades to everything. You can see the shadows and hear the people crying out. There's no sound. You can see the colors, too, as the street shines in the darkness. And in the air there are currents and stars. You have to know my saint."

Kobala turned away from the window and went back into the other room where the sound of his flute began again. Leader stood for a long time at the window, looking at the Hudson in the driveway.

We all wanted to meet Felicia," Reese said, putting his leg over a stool at the counter. "Kobala's coming when he finishes at the club."

Willie was there with an acquaintance's wife, and Reese had brought a girl who was already well on her way to oblivion. "We've been going since this afternoon and haven't been home," Willie said.

The diner was nearly full at midnight when they arrived, but when a table opened, Leader let them sit down. He brought around beers.

"Willie wants to do a story about you for the paper," Reese said. "He's looking for a line."

"I don't want a story."

"Be free advertising."

"I'd quit," Leader said.

"Do you know this person?" the drunken girl asked Reese. She slid her coat off and took up a bottle of beer.

"That's my brother."

"In that case, I'd like something to eat. I'm hungry."

When they ordered, Leader went back to cooking. He managed the place all alone, hurrying out the orders which the regulars called in to him through the window.

"Two over easy, Leader," shouted a woman from a booth.

"Order of hash browns, hey, Leader? And just set the coffee out here. I'll pass it around."

The place was harmony. Everyone helped out Leader, who couldn't possibly have managed by himself. In between orders, with Leader leaning on the counter, there was loud conversation about over-the-road hauls, fights, loves, and a hundred things. The jukebox rolled out one country song after another. Time moved in its soft way, with a backslap and a goodbye. Leader looked mournfully after each friend who paid and left.

Toward three in the morning there was a slack. It was the height of the darkness, when people either slept or moved. Leader came over to the table.

"When does Felicia arrive?" Willie wanted to know.

"I don't know if she will. She's usually here at four-thirty on Saturday morning."

The drunk girl had gone to sleep on the plastic seat of a booth, and Willie's girl leaned sleepily against him. They were all a little tight.

"We'll stay," Reese said. "Kobala will be here any moment."

They had a few more beers. Willie showed signs of impatience, as he hadn't been alone with his acquaintance's wife, and she was beginning to make protestations about being home. "Everyone's asleep now," Willie told her.

Then Kobala came in. He was dark, sweaty from the club, and he smiled at Leader. "Hey, where's the Hudson?" he asked, putting his flute case down on the table.

The drunken girl stirred from the booth. "In New York State," she said, raising herself up. "What time is it?"

"It couldn't get very far on its own," Reese said.

"Out back, ready to go," Leader said. "Really and truly."

"You drove the Hudson out here?"

"It's a good angle to a story," Willie put in. "Boy drives car full of trash."

"Go look," Leader told them.

Willie saw the opportunity and dragged the friend's wife with him.

"What do you mean 'ready to go'?" Kobala asked. He sat down and wiped his forehead.

"I wanted to wait until this morning to say goodbye to Felicia."

No one could dissuade him. Reese argued that it was just extending an already pointless existence. Kobala said that there would be an empty spot in the driveway. The drunken girl didn't understand.

At four-thirty Felicia came into the diner. She sat at a booth not far from Reese and Kobala and the girl. Leader was in the back.

"French toast and bacon, as usual, Leader," she called. "How are you?"

Leader came out from the back and smiled at her. As he passed the table to go over, Reese asked, "Who's that?"

"That's Felicia."

"But . . ."

"But what?" Leader stopped and looked at his brother.

"She's seventy years old!"

"Seventy-two. She's an ornithologist."

"Who?" the girl asked.

Reese fell back into his chair. Leader went across the diner to her table, and Kobala smiled.

Willie came in, his eyes narrowed with the dark outside. He had the wife by the hand, and they both looked rumpled. "Hey, it's there," he said loudly. "The Hudson's there, and there isn't any trash in it."

"It's clean and comfortable," the wife confirmed.

"Where's Leader's girl?" Willie asked.

Reese nodded, motioning with his head toward the booth.

"I don't see anybody."

"Lay off, Willie," Kobala said.

Leader came back toward the kitchen to make the French toast and bacon.

"Hey, Leader, where's Felicia?" Willie asked. "We

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want to see what you've been up to."

Reese got up as Leader brushed past. "That's Felicia at the booth," Reese said. "Come on, let's go."

"The old lady?"

"Yep."

Kobala interrupted. "I thought you wanted to be introduced," he said. "You aren't very polite if you leave now."

Leader brought out the French toast and bacon and took it to Felicia's table. What he liked most about her was the look in her eyes. She had an elvish glance, a smile, too, and in her eyes he could see the tides of fortune turning. She was a slight woman who wore army clothes and a camouflage hat of green and tan. He imagined her out in the marshes, in the woods or the swamps, or on the plains, with her binoculars trained upon some species of bird most people had never heard of, seeing in that round hole of vision the essence that was being destroyed by the rest of the world. In her eyes he could see the course of the old world, with distance and time in perspective, and with ambition and honor the justifications of fools. This woman cared about the world of flight, just as Leader cared about the world of beauty which was missed unless you looked for it.

Willie went over. "Aren't you going to introduce us all?" he asked facetiously.

"Let's go, Willie," Reese called. "It's damn late."

"No, wait a minute." In Willie's view the festivities were only beginning. The diner seemed to accelerate, and like most reporters, he was taking in the facts without regard to their consequences.

"You don't know what he might do," Reese said.

The whole group of them moved toward the table, except for Kobala.

"He won't do anything," Willie said. "We just want to meet his pride and joy."

Leader drew back from the table. His face changed. He hovered like a gargoyle above the rest of them, with his eyes wild-spinning. At the same time that he was silent and unmoving he was rushing madly through life. His face was red and distorted, and he clenched his fists.

Then Kobala started to play the flute. He had taken it from the case and had sat upon a table with his legs crossed like an idol's. He had pursed his lips and closed his eyes to the light. The shrill notes moved like footsteps through the air, cheerfully, gracefully.

The room stripped bare and no one knew what to do to maintain appearances. A few people came in, looked around, and went out again.

The music drifted into the pattern of profound sorrow. It sifted through a confusing maze and drew out the futility of the world. It dimmed and turned soft, and then rose again into the silence. Everyone listened for a moment, their attention drawn to Leader. For now he was transported somewhere into a time and space that no one else knew.

Suddenly Kobala stopped. The silence was immense.

"I think my husband will begin to worry," Willie's girl said. "I'd better get home."

Willie turned. "We've been up all night," he said.

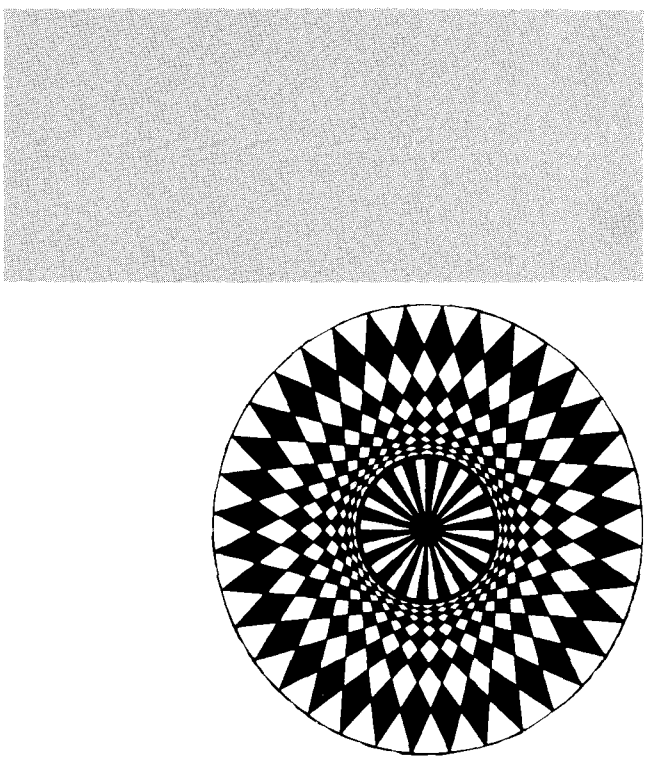
"No, wait a minute," Felicia said. "I think Leader has something to say."

And Leader spoke. He went on and on in babbling tones which no right-minded person could have understood. He talked in broken images and disjointed phrases, and often his voice was so quiet that it disappeared altogether. He tried to tell everything that he knew, and all that had happened to him in his lifetime of going on.

He said, "Long time ago . . . I couldn't bear any more. I could never make amends, you see, it was too much . . . and then came that saint who makes the music . . . not just the music of the flute, but the music of all things . . . turns folly around, crystalizes that which appears so nebulous . . . it depends, you see, on being willing to . . . but you have to reach a certain point to be able to see the glass shattering, some point when each grain of wheat more weighs an unbearable amount . . . then comes the saint to let you ease yourself. He isn't real because of necessity he deals with illusions, but neither is he unreal . . . who's to say? . . . so the music of all things wells up from that saint . . . turns itself inside out . . . pieces together shattered glass . . ."

After Leader spoke they all drifted slowly back into the dawn. Kobala got up and packed away his flute and cried. Willie led the wife and the drunken girl outside where they waited for Reese to bring around the car. And Felicia went out to the woods to look for her birds.

Leader never came back, and no one saw him again. That morning, like a mirage which had never been truly real, he fled again in the Hudson, out across the reach of the world. □



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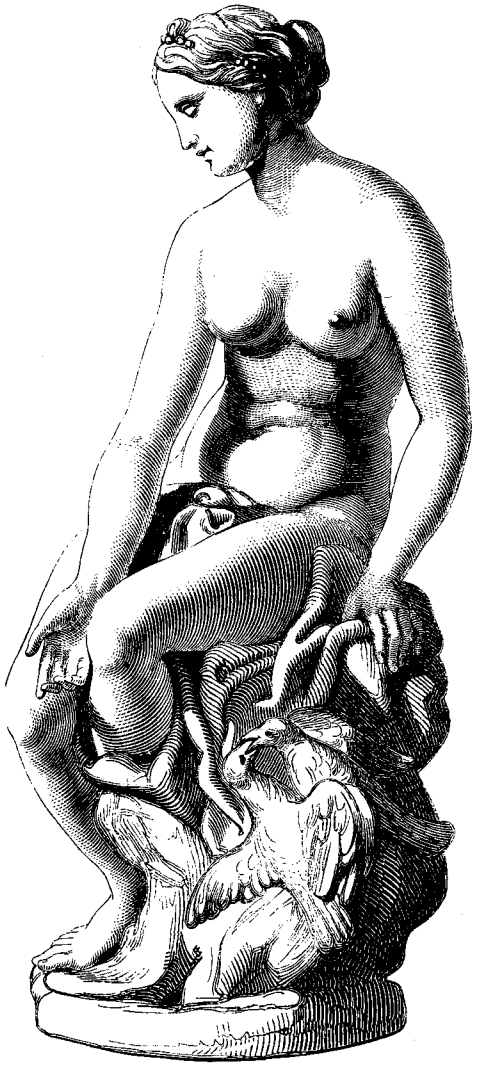
francesca

by Robert Schultheis



:1

All that great, luminous, dying pilgrimage Eastward —Istanbul (oceanic, glittering), Erzurum (dancing bears, mountains), Tabriz and Teheran (neon-infected Arabs), Mashad (where they stone Infidels), Herat (on the Silk Route), Kabul (snow-streaked Hindu Kush), the Khyber (gunfire in the night), Lahore (steamy dark hordes), Delhi (an English dowager lost in the swamp)—to Katmandu, golden temples twinkling in the sunset as we came over the last pass from the malarial Terai—I was thinking of Holy Men, high in ice caves in the Himalayas, who would magically descend to tell me the Truth, the Word —make me smile, forever. I danced with a god-intoxicated Sufi saint in Jalalabad, his white beard swirling like a comet's tail; smoked bhang with a skeletal saddhu in the railroad station in Banaras—high as a vulture, I wrote him up a Traveller's Cheque for ten dollars, at which he whooped for joy, and charged off to buy a "brand-new transistor radio"; talked dharma and karma and samsara and dhyana with a stout, kind, red-robed Tibetan friar in Bodghaya, while the sutras droned from a hundred beery cropskulls in the dim room—

But I never met a holy man who hit me as hard, as close to my heart and core, as Francesca, that tall, long-legged lady in the orange Nepali cotton dress and the grey yak wool sweater, a broadbrim felt hat on her black silk hair, a dozen rings on her long fingers—so fragile, at times, she seemed transluscent, unreal, an unsuccessful attempt at reality, a failed dream (once she said we were "like two shadows dancing on the dark side of the moon")—so strong, so darkly mercurial, at times, that she burned a hole in the center of the world, like a Black Hole of imploding matter—congealing everything around her into Francesca-ness, reverberations of her beauty and time.

:2

Francesca Robecci. Pre-Raphaelite lady, hollow sick-room beauty; travelling under Italian, French, German passports; she told me that she lived down the road from a villa of terrorists in Rome. The terrorists were always dropping by to cadge cigarettes and talk. They were Arabs, and quite disarming chaps: gay, eager to please; always prattling of some new atrocity in the works: an airliner dynamited out of the sky, an infant crêche fire-bombed . . .

"Art is a gesture in the face of eternity," she used to say. "I prefer accidents, beautiful accidents . . ."

:3

The day I left India the bus passed a rickety row of shops on the outskirts of Patankot, and in the open front of one I saw an immense fat Babu asleep on a rope cot in an empty room: the sign on the outside said, in imposing letters, HIMALAYAN SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH LTD. . . inside, the elephantine Babu in spotless white pajamas, sleeping away eternity . . . India.

At Landi Kotal, on the Khyber, I picked up two eight-ounce packets of pure heroin from a Pathan gangster named Khan Abdul Wali Khan. I was supposed to deliver them to a woman in Herat known only as "Francesca". I was to meet her at the Blue Hotel, a piss-smelling dank place in the Camel Bazaar: Herat, mud-colored, with the sea-blue mosques rising like spaceships aimed at Heaven; beggars screaming, lepers, unveiled Kuchi women with wicked tattoos . . .

It was the usual dead-end hotel on the road to Katmandu: French morphine addicts, English Buddhists, hashhasheens, smugglers, climbers, mad saints . . . They

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ROBERT SCHULTHEIS is no stranger to the NAR. He is a professional ski guide in Telluride, Colorado; this winter he led a climbing expedition to the Andes, and he is working on his doctorate in anthropology.

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sold any drug at the desk, "Hey meestah you buy hasheesh marywanna morfeen opium el es dee cocaine heroeen?"

Francesca and I . . . when I knocked on the door of that little room, and she appeared, and we smiled at each other, we knew immediately, both of us, that we would be lovers . . . this strange girl who had lived in Asia so long, on the darkest, lowest levels of crime . . . whose laughter burned down the night . . .

:4

The verglas was hard as marble: I stared up at Yamabushi. He was in a dodgy stance, on his front crampon points and ax, while he tried to smash a screw into the overhang with his hammer. The sky so blue it was almost black. The screw popped out, drifted down at me, banged off my helmet, vanished . . . I heard his harsh breathing, like a knife through burlap. 18,200 feet. Screws wouldn't take, the whole route was a farce. I belayed him back down to the ledge. "It won't go," he said. We were both numb from the cold, our fourth day on the East Ridge of that nameless ice pinnacle . . . I wasn't in love then; didn't care, free . . .

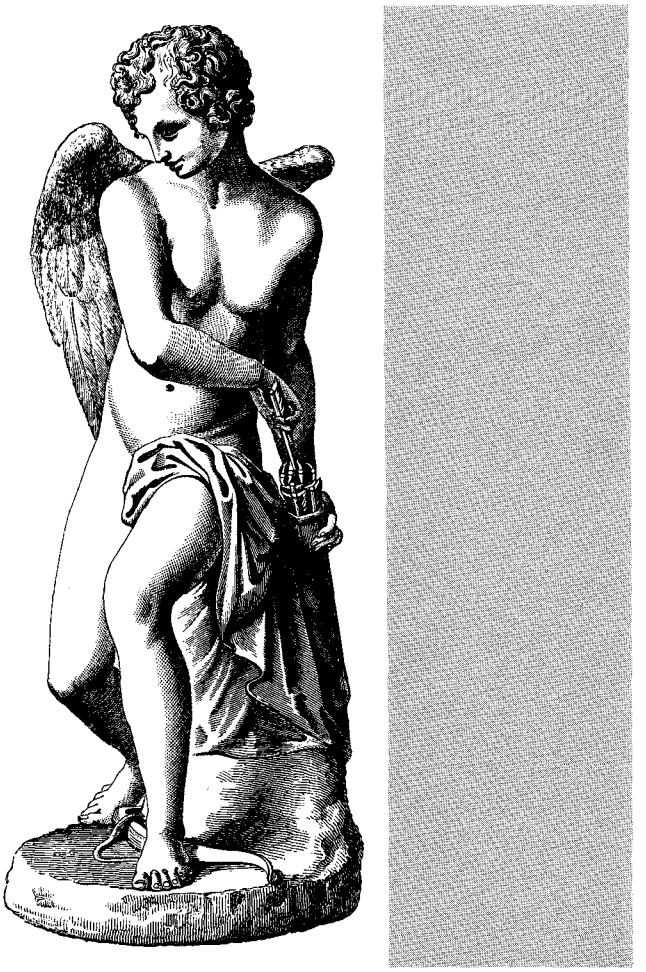
When we came down the next day, Base Camp was gone; a tremendous slab avalanche had swept down the Red Couloir, burying our companions under countless tons of snow and ice . . .

:5

In Nepal, in the Monsoon, the hill country is alive with leeches. In certain altitude zones they are so plentiful that it is impossible to avoid them. They drop off trees onto you; every branch you brush against leaves four or five of them snaking across your body; they climb off the ground onto your boots as you walk. They gnaw through your skin, and suck your blood, swelling to many times their original size, like obscene sausages, before they burst, or fall satiated from your bleeding body. If you lay down on the ground for half an hour you would be completely covered by a pulsating mass of the hideous things: they are drawn inexorably by body heat, infrared, which they can scent for distances of up to a hundred feet. I had to empty the blood out of my boots every mile or so, in smoky villages in the rain, on the long walk out from the Rolwaling Himal.

:6

European skies grey with snow; the wan sunlight on stubble straw and hard clod earth, where potatoes sleep like children. Broken mirrors of lake rune the raw tundra land, bone huts and stone gods, and stony roads to Nowhere. Winter came on me drinking port, stout, bottles with dragons and nymphs. Vineland, Iceland, Newfoundland, Eire . . . volcanoes, fumaroles in the Midnight Sun . . . the wolf sleeps in the blood; a frail, fanged, ancient droonk tried to tell me of a mythic city "Urdbourne"—a queen all in black, the Lady of the House of Sleep . . . lakes of Usquebaugh, bitter gold in the whiskey evening . . . "We'll go viking again," he sang . . .



:7

I flew out of London in a rusty dawn over Edwardian rooftops, chimneystacks, pigeons billowing in the buttery light in the park. Francesca's skin still a taste remembered on my tongue, taste of dust. Francesca was arrested in Iran, and sentenced to twenty years in prison. There were charges out on her from Bombay to Rome, she didn't have a chance. She is probably dead now: of morphine withdrawal, pneumonia—it is winter in Teheran now, snow in that electric Muslim city. Cold prison, boiled rice and grey bread full of dust—Francesca coughing her lungs out, the streets of dead trees, vast Central Asian skies rolling on for thousands of miles.

"Gagné la mort avec tous tes appetits,
et ton egoisme et tous les peches capitaux,"

she used to say, quoting Rimbaud: then she would laugh: "Typical French *merde*. In Afghanistan they shoot first and ask questions later."

I landed in New York on a bitter afternoon; the sky was like concrete, the smoke of the city frozen stiff, like tongs and bones . . . the two packages of heroin taped to my body were cold.

I wish the world
had only one head
so I could cut it off
with a single stroke. □

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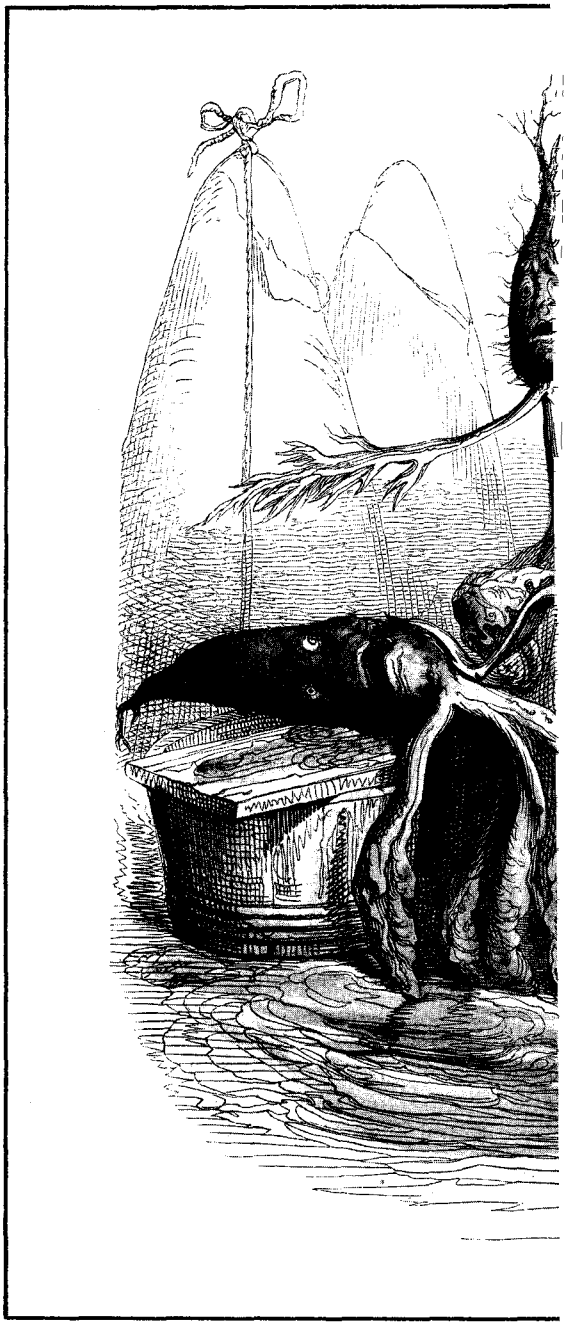
BOTULISM



i

What fancy did not turn the machine
Did not grind the gears of the imagination
Making the grower of potatoes 'stronger'
Men bound to their ploughs surer of a tradition
Teachers more willing, if not more able,
To break through the simmering crust of old decisions?

What fancy did not boil the blood that was deep in the machine
Until the steel flowed too, silent and raving,
Bleeding nuclei like grains of corn
Over the thickening soil?

ii

He prepares his dinner.
In his food there is a forest of preservatives.
He imagines the forces of preservation
Battling in his spinach like germs wounded in a corner of virus
Fighting back against the century's newest cleansers.

When he has finished eating he refers himself to the garden.
How fresh it was, after dinner, to return to the garden
As to a Mother of Giving.

Now though there is only a fragrance of greenness.
Palliatives have been applied to the greenness.

He launches himself into the darkness of the garden
Taking plant after plant by its unfolding leaves

He prepares his dinner
Come into the lawn, he begs it
But nothing green is left, to burden
The fiery history of the lawn . . .

iii

There was nothing but greenness.
The columns of the Parthenon were covered with lichens.
Patches of greenness drove up the hollow glistening of the marble
Greenness blossomed from the marble hand of the rabbi
Bending as he did into the special lonely posture of cleansing
Thinking that the temple could be cleansed of its grassiness.

There was nothing but greenness.
Sometimes he wrote with a pen that was green.
He flowered his letters over the ripe wood page
Dreaming of a summer in the Laurentian Mountains,
Of 'Old Québec', of crutches at Ste Anne de Beaupré,
Finally of two sleek liners chasing each other.
That time too the water turned suddenly green
Reversed on itself. and carved out its placid swathe
Evenly like a John Deere plough,
Like the curved green moon of the castrator's knife.

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frederic will

iv

Now there are endless forests
Stretching from here to the farthest reach of his pen.

His eyes comb the forest in every direction
Smoothing it, barbering, tailoring the pines
Until they seem little more than another lawn.

Greece grew thickly as a lawn in his eyes,
Swimming up under the tourist hotels
With the easy assurance of a deep water squid.

Now he is putting the green back yard of those years
In the small of his back.

Can you see?

History is walking in him straight and dark as a broom,
Sailing over the cautious world.

He is drinking his blood
Ominously.

v

The peak, for there is a peak of the mountain,
Takes him tirelessly up over the dark brown horizon
Ochre stamping out colors less hardened by weather
Until at night he pauses to rest.

'There, down below' - he is pointing - 'the village is nesting.
Three gray sparrows are sitting in the eave by my window
I am out of breath, listening to the moon eat
Wounded parts of the heaven, and the constellations lose shape.'

The constellations look down on his vision and darken.

There is a mode of ferocity that overtakes the stars

Ohne Hast ohne Rast.

Ruhest du auch
say the pines
Squeezing him closely like an historical doll
a figure he had seen in the Children's Museum
Edinburg, 1960

vii

What fancy did not turn the machine
did not grind the gears of the imagination?

Now there is place for a bud in the machine
now there is a corner of beauty in the machine
where even the machine has not gone . . .

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Here are the senators folding the machines
Watch, they are wrapping each of the machines in a fountain of purple
each of the machines is being raised, is being presented . . .
is being adored . . .

There it is in the center of the temple, the Dark Machine
ruinously filled with its imagination
and around it people are bending

The rabbi bends to the lustration of chrome
purifying the Machine with double cloths
and by then it is weeping
splotched with the dates of the Kings of Scotland

You too will rest
somewhere - he is pointing - over the bony ear of the mountain
where it seems cocked at the sky

Nothing, he remembers, ruins the sky like a hearing
like the dark black of the ear
floating in the endless heavens

In silence he lifts up pieces of the heavens
watching how they move and shimmer

Then he puts back the oval lip of his beauty
and passes for an hour

Into the wheeling constellations of the organs

into the overgrown jungle of organs
that raves in his chest . . .

and for years there will be no more Machines
but only the memory of their death

And the Machine that replaced the Machines
the dark green berries,
the foster children.

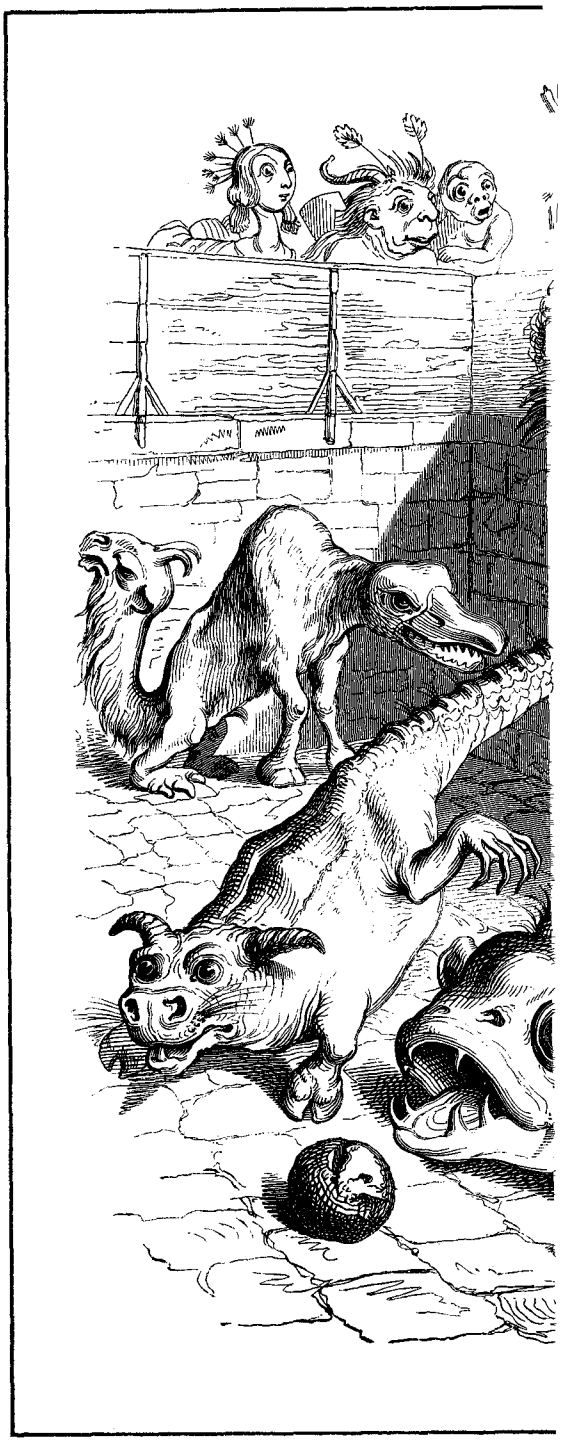
And the Imagination that cleansed the Machine

viii

What fancy did not turn the Machine
in Vietnam?

Did not there open the springs of water
Into the forgotten paddies
Deafening even the gunfire?

What course of action was not expended
Carelessly as a doctrine
Among the simmering weeds?



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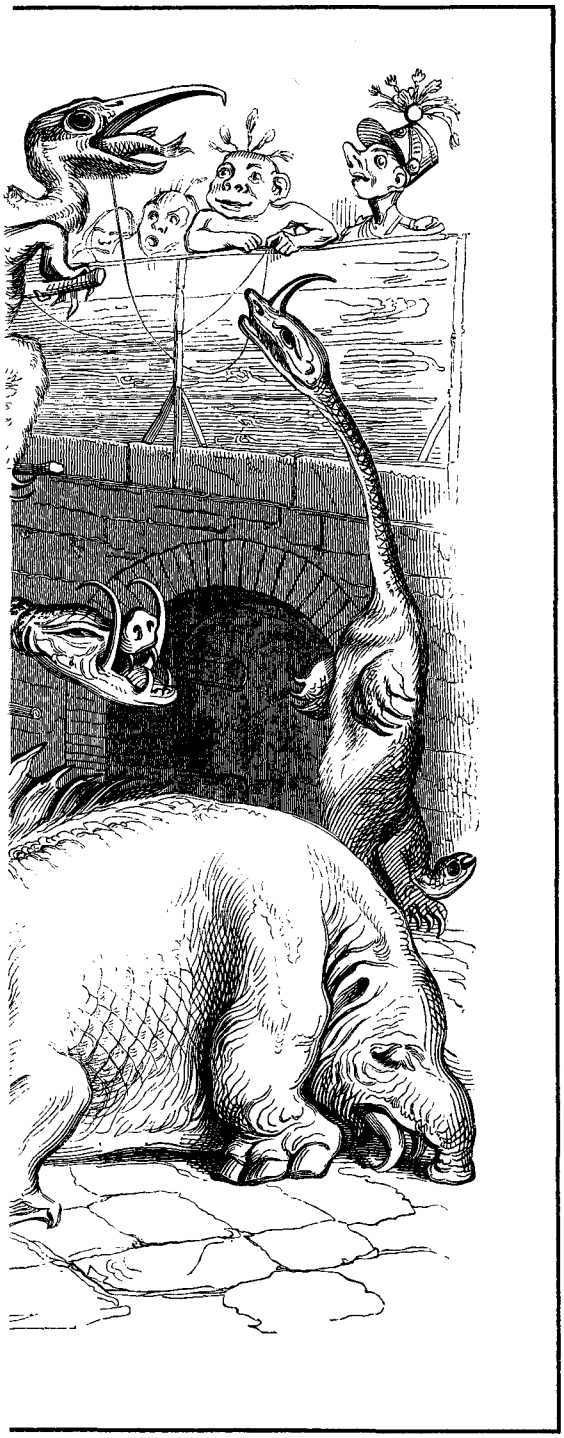

Now you see tanks and they are blooming from their foreheads
Each of them grinning with the flower of its steel

Each of them wounded
Nothing is left to each but its silence

Even that silence is unreal

ix

He turns to the green of his vegetation
Climbing the stair into the mind
Cupboarded in the burning forests of green.
The column of the mind is covered with green.
Now he can feel himself conscious
Cut loose openly into the maudlin field of his desire.
He bends, he is sweetening the atrophied column with his fingers
He is turning his fancy in endless arcs of desire.

Now he can tell what a sweetness has come

Once more he makes his way among the diamond gardens
Laid out before him in the bloom of a smile.
He has time in his hand.
It grows weary but he picks it up.
Now he is planting it too in the corner of the garden.
He is waiting for it too to grow before him.
He is waiting for time to grow sweet before him
He is waiting to cleanse it.

He turns again to his vegetation.
But it is mounting above him in tunnels
It is rising like a network of funnels into the sky

Now he is watching it grow, but from the Dark Machine,
Rising and falling from the Machine itself
Climbing from the breathing pores of the machinery.

But now it is watching him from his body's machine
Watching him climb and darken from inside himself

He is watching himself as he grows.

The Machine is climbing until it touches the sky.

He turns to the green that is inside the Machinery.
But it is darker now.
It is coming apart in the machine's dark center.
It is giving life to the machine itself
But it is dying now in the machine's dark center
It is dying there

It is dying, it is growing and dying

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John Lindberg
Robert Gish
Mark Rudman

Blackward Classes

Black Education: Myths and Tragedies, by Thomas Sowell. David McKay. $6.95

We might as well say "American" education as "black" education, because the myths and tragedies that plague black education are the same ones that plague the whole American educational establishment. We have never faced the dilemma of education in a democratic society, how to offer quality to everyone. We have been equally foolish to impose archaic mandarin standards and to accept pragmatically expedient contemporary ones. The problems of black education have exposed our failure in honesty and realism. This failure is part of our history, and until we can recognize it, we will continue blind in our inability to match our services with our needs.

Any system is judged by its victims, and blacks are traditionary victims. So are students. The pressures and tactics we get now from black students are simply a more visible, extreme consequence of our short-sighted policies adopted in response to the demands of parents and students, black and white, whom we have encouraged in the democratic belief that they should get what they want, whether or not it is academically viable. White students have long adopted tactics of pressure and boycott when forced into a demanding course of study. They complain that the teacher is "over their heads," that he grades hard, that the homework is too heavy, that the text is dull. They refuse to participate in classroom discussion, and then complain about the lectures they have forced the teacher to give. They do few of the assigned projects, and then complain about the tests. They cut class, and then complain about the attendance requirement. They constantly try to weaken and transform the academic program for reasons of social relevance, usefulness on the job, or even high enrollment. And they know that increasing numbers of the public and the educational establishment support them.

Recent black problems are only the last touch to a cumulative deterioration in our college programs. Added to the decades-long process of public accommodation mentioned in the previous paragraph, we have now created the new threat of lowered admissions requirements to compensate for the recession-related decline in enrollment. Nationwide, freshman SAT scores are down 10% and 15%; SATs over 1000 are thought superior; SATs over 800 are welcome; SATs of 400 and 500 are common. Now has come the political ukase from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to the states, mandating deadlines for achieving minority quotas in state colleges. This political mandate is indifferent to the fact that it requires us actually to recruit inferior students—not only students who did poor work in high school, but also students with deficiencies in basic skills, and many with learning disabilities.

Perhaps the HEW mandate is justice delayed. Perhaps we have only ourselves to blame if we are unprepared for this new influx of problem students. But how many of us think the political establishment has betrayed its long-time servant and apologist, the educational establishment? Whether or not we have brought our grief upon ourselves, we find it almost impossible to admit that desperate ills need desperate remedies. Most of us in the colleges cannot conceive of the need for new programs. We have forced black studies into the conventional curriculum. We have pretended that the black faces are simply not in our classrooms, rather than face the need for hours of tutorials and conferences. We have quietly burked proposals for remediation programs and special staffs. We have given the reason that we would lower standards if we gave credit for remedial work, and that a teacher cannot be paid for giving a non-credit course. The impasse is elegant.

The book under review anatomizes the social disability of blacks as an unwanted problem in our colleges, and proposes a way out of the dilemma. We all remember the anxiety of transition from junior to senior high, from high school to college, or from there to graduate school. But with us it was a transition, not a dead-end trauma. Sowell writes: "It is a shock of the first magnitude to discover that your intellectual performance is miles below that of others around you, and miles below what the institution presupposes." (p. 111) Only a teacher who has worked with these students can have an adequate idea of their abysmal inability. Many cannot compose a complete sentence, read above third-grade level, or do simple fractions. They are lifetime victims of the social pass and the track-system in the schools. And they share to the full the common American assumption that the schools exist for their pleasure and convenience. They never consider themselves deficient. They have been conditioned to a society of mediocre peers created by the schools. Yet they are expected to compete. As Sowell explains eloquently, without prolonged systematic intellectual discipline, they have never known the immense, uplifting satisfaction of solving problems and creating their own progress. (pp. 124-25) We must create institutions that will provide that experience for all students. As has happened so often in our past, the blacks have pointed the way out of our dilemma.

Sowell's own career qualifies him to evaluate black programs. After

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public school in the Harlem ghetto (he names the schools), he studied at Howard, then transferred to Harvard for his B.A. He took his M.A. at Columbia, his Ph.D. at Chicago, and has taught at Douglass, Howard, Cornell, Brandeis, and UCLA. He has taught straight academic courses in economics, and directed a special program for blacks at Cornell, where he observed while trying to stop the 1969 guns-on-campus incident. He has always tried to help disadvantaged students and has learned how militancy diverts academic efforts. He has no brief for the student, writing (p. 37): "In view of my own gross misconceptions as a student, I have never been able to regard student beliefs as the star by which to guide academic policy." But he is equally incisive about the way the adults have created the pressures that incite student unrest.

First is the misguided recruitment policy (p. 80 and throughout the book). Any student with ability or a good academic record is passed over as "middle-class," automatically disqualified. "Socio-political criteria" decide. Sowell conveys the desperate irony of bringing such people to college (p. 82): "Recruiting policies brought in many black students who were academically unprepared for Cornell, financial aid policies aimed at maximum numbers reduced the possibility of their making up for serious educational deficiencies, and the social milieu helped turn their individual frustrations into group suffering and group anger." Then "a small clique of white activists and black militants" (p. 80) exploited the students' humiliation. Various devices were used to segregate black students from the white world of the university. An instructor admitted students by personal permission only. At another school, pre-registration procedures are used to channel blacks into supposedly less demanding courses, where again they are subject to treatment emphasizing their separateness within the school. Finally, once procedures were established, program directors worked to retain control of admissions and financial aid. Thus they ensured a continuous supply of unprepared students. (p. 120) With the HEW mandate, this practice can be open policy.

What is the effect of such practices on the academic community? reci-

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divism: the student reverts to his high school behavior and contaminates the efforts of his peers. A typical anecdote is worth recounting (pp. 86-89), because teachers of students in these programs could supply many more from their own experience. A student stopped working. A lawyer approved Sowell's decision to stop the stipend. The department chairman agreed that the student be dropped. The student said nothing when Sowell confronted him, but then called a friend on the faculty of another college. This man was a friend of a colleague of Sowell's, who spoke to the department chairman, who reversed his decision, continued the stipend, and arranged an alternative "relevant" program for the student. The decision was stolen from Sowell, who traces the consequences (p. 90): "Once this pattern of intervention began, morale collapsed in the program. A degenerating atmosphere of noncooperation and petty mischief developed in my class, and reports began coming in from other faculty members that students from this program were now absenting themselves for days, missing examinations, refusing to participate in class discussions, etc." Students who wished to continue to meet standard requirements were ostracized by the others until they conformed. (p. 91) (A personal anecdote is relevant here: a student militant doing B work sent his teacher a Christmas card signed "your secret friend despite misunderstandings.") It is typical that Sowell's student used influence rather than accept academic responsibility. Like his peers, he assumed that academic success is a matter of forcing a decision, not a matter of work.

How can we break out of this impasse? Sowell offers a three-part reform: "consortium recruiting" (p. 301), remediation (p. 302), and precollege training centers (p. 308). Contrary to the myth that good black students are scarce (p. 131), black schools and colleges have much unnoticed talent, unnoticed because of the myth that a bright black is a middle-class black and needs no help, unnoticed because black supervisors often feel threatened by bright protégés. If several colleges were to pool their recruiting efforts instead of competing to fill HEW quotas, they would better match clients with colleges and programs appropriate to their needs, and they would cooperatively discover overlooked talent. Next, the best treatment for unprepared students, bright or not, is to admit their weaknesses and to offer without apology programs that are frankly remedial. Too often the black program is modeled on the conventional curriculum and offers conventional academic credit. The program becomes a forcing frame. Its courses become advanced placement courses. The students are tutored by peers chosen for their feeling of black solidarity and all too often the tutors do the work, which the students then submit as their own. Instead, Sowell proposes genuine remediation aimed at developing the student's ability, rather than submerging all talent in the drive for marginal academic survival.

One might well be skeptical of the success of such remediation, but that is because remedial programs have always been on the campus of a host institution and, as above, inevitably mimic the academic curriculum. Such programs create the syndrome of anti-intellectual militancy that Sowell has analyzed so well, because underprepared blacks feel inundated in a white ocean where they cannot swim. The way out has to be a new kind of program—what Sowell calls a precollege training center—in a black environment, or at least not subservient to a host institution with its intricate questions of how the program staff fits into the institutional power structure and how the remedial courses can be offered for academic credit. Such a center would have its own program, its own staff, and its own place in the ghetto community. It would offer its own certificates of completed courses of study aimed at vocational choices, including college entrance. A student entering college from such a center would be prepared to compete academically and would not need to find his identity in an anti-institutional power bloc. The precollege training center would soon demonstrate its worth to area employers and colleges, and the ghetto clientele, black and white, would make the public schools reform their own student policies.

Neither is this kind of program fanciful. It already exists and has an impressive record of successful graduates. This is the Opportunity Industries Corporation, begun about 20 years ago by black churches and now offering courses in many cities. It is essentially an adult-education version of the vo-tech school, supported by grants and contributions as well as tuition. Another version is the off-campus extension center, sponsored by a host institution but separately staffed and with the program directed by the staff responsive to community need. (The University of Northern Iowa began such a center in East Side Waterloo with programs ranging from off-the-street nursery school to internship in social welfare.) Before the Nixon freeze, local action centers in the Community Action Program in many cities hosted a range of services from sewing classes to tutoring in high school subjects. Colleges must admit the need for such independent remediation, help establish it, and use it in admissions. That would be democratic education without the myths and the tragedies of waste they cause. —*John Lindberg*

Westering

The Last West: A History of the Great Plains of North America, by Russell McKee. Crowell. $8.95.

White Savage: The Case of John Dunn Hunter, by Richard Drinnon. Schocken. $12.50.

The Flamboyant Judge, A Biography, by James D. Hamlin, as told to J. Evetts Haley and William Curry Holden. Palo Duro Press. $10.00.

Land of the Coyote, by George Holmes Beine and Shirley Holmes Cochell. Iowa State. $5.95.

Wherever the American West is, in time, space, fact, or myth, it is strangely alluring and elusive but inescapable—a curious paradox of attraction and, as D. H. Lawrence would have it, of escape. Whether one thinks of the West as "Old," "Far," or "Wild," it represents an individual and national self seeking. The search is dramatized in today's nostalgia for the pleasant and painful glories of the Western past, and, at the same time, in attempts to demythologize the heroes of the West and

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to rewrite its history. The influence of the West is particularly evident in popular culture: entertainment, literature, film and television; the Nashville sound; rodeos; football played by "Cowboys" and "Broncos;" clothes with the ubiquitous Western cut; even the doubling and tripling sales of Indian jewelry. This popularity is not surprising, for the winning of the trans-Mississippi West is a part of our relatively recent heritage and the settlement of the whole country is fundamentally a Western enterprise. It is understandable, too, that in the crisis-ridden, economically troubled decade of the seventies, nostalgia should patronize places like the West. Much of it is innocent good fun, a fantasy that allows the country to cope. But nostalgia has its disturbing, threatening side too: commercial exploitation; mindless consumerism and consumption; gratuitous violence for fun and profit; something, in general, that might be identified by Philip Slater's term, "the pursuit of loneliness." However Americans regard the West, as geographical and human fact or as myth to live by, it merits thinking about—not as a mere pocket book or a pair of Levi's, but as a significant force still shaping our lives as it has shaped lives throughout American history. Some of the various ways this force has "manifested" itself are the concern of the histories and autobiographies reviewed here, and although John Dunn Hunter, James D. Hamlin, and George Beine are neither popular nor especially marketable at first glance, they make helpful reading for anyone the least bit interested in finding his or her way while tracking along the Bicentennial trail.

Russell McKee's *The Last West* is a panoramic attempt to define that part of the West known as the Great Plains, the *Llano Estacado* or Great American Desert, and to defend it as more than a flat, arid grassland, an ecological and psychological gap to be tolerated on the way between destinations East and West, past and future. He respectfully, almost reverently, delves into the geological background, the landforms and their use and misuse by people and wildlife over the past four centuries. His objective is a somewhat urgent call to action, an attempt to clear up misunderstandings, an invitation for people to see and appreciate, while there is still time, this one-fifth of our continental land area as, among other things, "the most important single piece of agricultural terrain in the world." Geographically, the Great Plains are east of the Rockies, stretch from southern Texas north into Canada, vary in width from two- to six-hundred miles, and encompass about 550 million acres and several climatic zones. But the relationship of geography to people is the real story—how spirit of place and settlement affected each other (the same story, really, though more generally told, as that of Drinnon, Hamlin, and Biene).

Although McKee spends several informative, amusing, and shocking chapters on sundry explorers, Indians, mountain men, cowboys, politicians, promoters, ordinary folks, and zealots —with anecdotes, statistics, and bibliographies—what deserves special attention is his commentary on present and future uses of the Great Plains. As McKee sees it, and there is little room for disagreement, the present is tense and the future even more tense, almost apocalyptic. The world's energy, food, and population problems will cause and be caused by difficulties out West. No escape from that. Ever increasing demands on wheat and cattle production, further land erosion, greater scarcity of water, exhausted oil and gas reserves in Texas and Oklahoma, the ravages of strip mining as coal is substituted for oil—it all adds up to profound social, economic, scenic, and environmental change and the probable end to what McKee judges to be a pleasant way of life, perhaps the last of its kind. McKee's nostalgia is futuristically and frighteningly for the present. What to do? General advice: without much plan, and while the gasoline supply holds, seize a few days or months on the back roads of the last West.

* * *

The governmental policies of the nineteenth century with regard to land and people, which in large measure brought us to such straits, are not new topics for readers of *The North American Review*, which since its beginning has reflected much of the drama, attitudes, incident, and character behind such policy decisions. One drama, even more meaningful in retrospect, is the controversy surrounding the authenticity of John Dunn Hunter, whose case is somewhat irately traced for us by Richard Drinnon. Drinnon makes clear that Hunter was and still is of special interest among examples of Indian-Anglo contact, being white by birth but red by experience—a "white savage" or "moral hermaphrodite" who, in his struggles and failures to build a mutual Indian-Anglo federation, serves as a kind of eponym for the by now familiar confrontation of primitivism and civilization. And just as Hunter was in an epic sense more than a man, an allegorical emblem of the American "hunt" for equality and brotherhood, Drinnon's book is more than a minor case study or historical search for an obscure identity. *White Savage* and the life that was Hunter's should weigh heavily on every American's bicentennial conscience when we "celebrate" the winning of the West from the "Red Savage."

A century ago most people knew or thought they knew John Dunn Hunter, author of *Memoirs of a Captivity among the Indians of North America* (London 1824), a work which influenced Cooper and Thoreau and which Drinnon ranks "a minor classic in the American literature of self-discovery." As a historian concerned with patterns of American violence, Drinnon first met Hunter on a "side trail" in England while reading Hoxie Fairchild's *Noble Savage*, looked up Hunter's memoirs and was himself captivated; but in the process of editing a modern edition he discovered the controversy about Hunter's alleged imposture, and ended up spending four years trying to accurately identify Hunter. The product of Drinnon's effort is an impassioned and slightly partisan, but honestly logical and ultimately convincing defense of Hunter's original claims.

Lewis Cass, Governor of Michigan Territory, Andrew Jackson's Secretary of War, perennial Democratic candidate for President, critic of Cooper's Indians, and touted Indian expert, is the prime villain in the drama, the person most responsible for the character assassination of Hunter which took the form of a review of Hunter's book in the January 1826 issue of the NAR (Cass earned his reputation as "expert" plus an honorary law degree as a result of three Indian essays in the NAR: "Indians of North America,"

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XXII [January 1826], 53-119; "Heckewelder on the American Indians," XXVI [April 1828], 357-403; and "Removal of the Indians," XXX [January 1830], 62-121; also see "British Policy in Respect to the Indians" [January 1840], excerpted in Vol. 258 [Winter 1973], 24-25).

Jared Sparks, then editor of the NAR, endorsed Cass's role as an authority, but rather frantically and belatedly pushed Cass for full supportive facts as the battle lines in the ensuing controversy began to form. London's *National Gazette* kindled the argument by siding with Hunter, a favorite of the British since his visit there during the winter of 1823-1824. It was the *Literary Gazette* which first brought Hunter to Cass's attention by publishing lengthy extracts of Hunter's memoirs in its April 1823 issues and likening him to Robinson Crusoe and the myth of natural man. During the course of the controversy Hunter's detractors, in addition to Cass and Sparks, included William Clark, the explorer; Stephen F. Austin, lengendary Texan; Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, Indian agent; Peter Stephen Duponceau, pioneer linguist; and John Neal, American novelist. Hunter's supporters included Elias Norgate, author of the *National Gazette* defense pamphlet; Cyrus Redding, editor of the *New Monthly Magazine;* John Halkett, historian of Indian-white relations; Richard Fields, the Cherokee chief to whom, along with Tecumseh, Drinnon dedicates his book; George Catlin, famous Indian painter and ethnologist; and Thomas Jefferson, whom Drinnon attempts to demythologize and renders a bit of a hypocrite and racist. Along this parade of historical personages, Drinnon stresses and laments the 200 years of federal genocidal policies toward the American Indian, not the least of which was the Jackson-Cass Cherokee removal, a "Trail of Tears" Hunter attempted to assuage but which ironically led to his real rather than literary assassination by Cherokee chiefs, Big Mush and The Bowl, while Hunter was watering his horse. Hunter's martyrdom came about through his alliance in Texas and Mexico with the Cherokees, notably Richard Fields and Herman Mayo in an attempt to create the red and white Republic of Fredonia. This short-lived Nacogdoches communal experiment was, in effect, sabotaged by Austin and his compatriot Texas adventurer, Peter Ellis Bean—a man Drinnon identifies with Cooper's plundering squatter in *The Prairie,* Ishmael Bush, as one of America's representative men. Drinnon's judgment: "Austin and Bean may not have pulled the trigger of the weapon that killed Hunter, but they had put his assassin out there on the creek bank".

White Savage can be read in different ways for different ends, but one conclusion is safe: the significance for today of John Dunn Hunter's life and death as Drinnon pulls him from oblivion is that most people need to re-examine the place of Native Americans in our history and question the price paid to progress for Indian victimization. In an impressive epilogue Drinnon cites the importance of Hunter's influence on American literary tradition by way of Cooper and Thoreau. What might be called nostalgia for the uncivilized over the civilized and the romantic disposition for civil disobedience in the face of unjust laws has been with us from the first, and though the ideal is tarnished the assumptions and feelings behind it are murmuring yet. Drinnon sees himself continuing what Thoreau began in his notebooks —a copper-tinted history of a country still in need of racial, spiritual, and ecological wholeness.

* * *

The copper tint in *The Flamboyant Judge* is that of whiskey, grayed by a wisp of cigar smoke and aged by an eventful reminiscence of a Kentucky "gentleman" who as a youth headed for the Klondike but wound up in Texas. This "on the make," serendipitous, 90-proof attitude accounts for much of what turned out to be J. D. Hamlin's life—along with what the Judge flamboyantly calls "amatory adventures." As a septuagenerian raconteur (one struggles not to be imprinted by J. D.'s style), Hamlin savors, seemingly with bourbon and cigar in hand, his wheeling and dealing out West where men were men and controlled land, towns, ranches, the law—just about everything except the weather or, in Hamlin's case, the railroad—"joyful times among colorful characters, in an age that is gone forever without leaving anything equally good to replace it." "Colorful" characters like Stephen F. Austin and Peter Bean do not cross this book's pages, but Temple Houston is here and so is Cabe Adams, as we read about the three billion acre XIT Ranch, the 400,000 acre LX Ranch, Amarillo, Dalhart, Texico, Clovis, Tucumcari, Santa Fe, Taos, and, every so often, Juarez and points south, all part of the stomping ground Russell McKee advocates visiting. Whether one travels routes 54 and 66 before, during, or after reading *The Flamboyant Judge,* the book should be read. What one finds between its covers is the ambience of frontier life in and around the Texas Panhandle and eastern New Mexico from 1890 through the first half of the twentieth century.

Hamlin died of cancer in 1950 at the age of seventy-eight in Clovis, New Mexico, and dictated his story in installments. Thirty years ago historians J. Evetts Haley and W. Curry Holden began the project of gathering Hamlin's memories; a tribute to a man and an era both editors obviously loved. The sequence of the events and the wording is Hamlin's; only in a preface, a personal reflection, and numerous footnotes do Haley and Holden intrude. The tone of the Judge's autobiography and editorial intrusions are delightful, especially to those with playfully ironic sensibilities. Hamlin is sincere, though not without humor, but he shouldn't be trusted in his claim to be presenting his memoirs as "quite tame and uninteresting." As for efforts to be truthful, Haley says, "This is Judge Hamlin's story and not our own . . . . We have served only as editors, sympathetic yes, but still under the stern discipline of the historian." The Judge dismisses any inaccuracy to the failing memory of his old age and insists on his right not to discuss "circumstances of purely personal interest."

> *There may be surprise and there could be shock at the utter candor and honesty of the story, but pious pretense or hypocrisy were never among his failings. His charm in recounting his wildest escapades disarmed and captivated the most proper Victorian dowager, while his unorthodox convictions and even his sins all but assumed a saintly halo when recounted in his faultless diction, burnished with his regal courtesy and good manners.*

A more brooding, iconoclastic histor-

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ian like Drinnon would conceivably see the Judge and his "story of Amarillo and the development of the great ranches of the Texas Panhandle" somewhat differently. Admittedly, like John Dunn Hunter's and most other names out of the West, one wonders about the "real" J. D. Hamlin. Certainly he was flamboyant. As for his intemperance and dissipation —or, as the Judge refers to it from time to time, his "potations"—Haley approvingly asserts, "While whiskey undoubtedly militated against his professional and business interests, it certainly never hampered his style, but often seemed to help."

The "style" of everyone concerned with writing this book is one of its most engaging features—hyperbolic, formally informal, somewhere between Cooper's phrasing in the Leatherstocking saga and Barth's *Sot-Weed Factor*, conveying an effect of unintended parody. One stylistic model admired by the judge and reprinted in a special commemorative appendix is Temple Houston's "Plea for a Fallen Woman." Houston made his plea originally when he staggered into a Texas courtroom and spoke in defense of a whore Hamlin characterizes as dim-witted. Bursting with pride in Houston's friendship as he relates the anecdote, Hamlin judges, "Temple Houston was beyond doubt the ablest criminal lawyer in the entire Panhandle." And according to the Judge, Houston was at his best when "in cups"—a favorite phrase of Hamlin's. The result of Houston's oratory? "Not a dry eye in the room. Tears ran down the cheeks of the judge, and when sufficiently recovered, he apologized to the defendant, dismissed the case and instructed the sheriff to take her to a restaurant and buy her a good meal." Houston's convincing line of argument in those days had been, in effect, that men make women and men break them. As drinking companions, J. D. and Temple dubbed one favorite "sweetened compote" of whiskey, sugar, and water, "The Houston-Hamlin Toddy." This is only one of several friendships which the Judge fondly recounts, the kind of "contact" which made West Texas.

Women, in turn, made Hamlin's life more than tolerable. As he would have it, "Nowhere on earth does one see such beauty and dignified propriety as in a high class Mexican whorehouse". He had one wife for sure, Kate Nichols, and possibly two, for he thinks he just might have married a Mexican beauty on one of his border escapades. Kate and the Judge eventually separated and though he explicitly affords her fine tribute, he implicitly passes judgment on her role in his life by not devoting very much space to her in the book. As for his border raids, they represent his capacity for mixing business with pleasure, spontaneous happenings which he remembers as the best moments in his life.

Many of the Judge's "successful" ventures were related not so much to his position as lawyer and county judge, but to his membership in Kappa Sigma fraternity (he joined while attending Kentucky University), his management of the XIT Ranch and the Capitol Reservation Lands of the Farwell family, his land sales and promotions, and his helping to win the Spikes trial—the result of a libel suit by the Spikes family against Hamlin and historian Haley for their book on the history of the XIT Ranch. *The XIT Ranch of Texas and the Early Days of the Llano Estacado* was allegedly libelous to the Spikes family in treating their association in New Mexico with the Henry Hawkins gang of outlaws. The two chapters which deal with this trial provide a special highlight, particularly the months spent lining up witnesses like Cabe Adams, portrayed as a remarkable outlaw for whom the Judge developed warm regard.

* * *

George Holmes Beine's life as recounted in *Land of the Coyote* is romanticized a bit, but with austerity and little flair. Growing up farming in South Dakota in the early 1900's was a struggle. The nostalgia is there, for boyhood rather than adulthood as with Hamlin, but Beine makes it clear that in those days one really had to work—though he is not one to explicitly moralize and pontificate. His experience as a boy in South Dakota was a harsh one; as a man he left it to find greater material comforts further west in California, a phase of his life not covered in the book.

In the move from Omaha to the expected "good life" of Kimball, Beine's life was made harder by a father not in the least prepared for farm life. Much in the vein of Hamlin Garland's *Boy Life on the Prairie*, George reminisces about the hard times endured by his brothers Nick and Eddie; his sister, Agnes; his mother and himself. Their homestead arrival consisted mainly of greetings by a land of coyotes, a ramshackle house full of snakes, and persistent visitation by hordes of rats. The fun times included hunting ducks and prairie chickens and, after the family was more or less socially established, in Sunday baseball games. Most of the book deals with the various jobs Beine held at the nearby farms and ranches of Charley Saunders, Aaron Havlik, and the arch exploiter, Reber. Beine earned his way busting sod and breaking wild horses; his friends included Sy Singer and his half-breed wife, Fanny; Jupe Havlik, and such colorful characters (with names to match) as Texas Al, Vinnie Gregg, and Pearly Gates. In what has come to be the stereotypical Western way, Beine had his friendly horse, Blaze, and a special sweetheart, Saunders' daughter Sis; he chose to give them both up to become, as it turned out, an insurance executive. Beine's youthful and fear-struck encounter with Indians has its stereotyped side, too, but nothing completely destroys the uniqueness Beine's life held.

In his comments on childhood, Beine's Texas contemporary, Judge Hamlin, says, "Young people today are overly indulged with artificial means of amusement. They have toys of all kinds, canned music, picture shows, cars at an early age, and many types of sports. It is all rather stereotyped, and the children are rather bored with it all". But if the stereotypes of the present do not carry back to the past, the stereotypes of past eras frequently carry over to the present. Such is the stuff, in part, of today's Western nostalgia: McKee's yearning for a present that might well seem idyllic when the future comes; Drinnon's desire for a new historical perspective on Indian-Anglo relations; J. D. Hamlin's regrets about a flamboyant age lapsed into boredom; and Beine's dream of working one's way to a better life—all four in some way acted on and thus created the substance of their nostalgia. In a day of so much passivity, viewing, and conditioned buying, today's Western spectators should be so lucky.

—*Robert Gish*

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Sleek for the Long Flight, by William Matthews. Random House. $1.95 paper.

In *Ruining the New Road*, William Matthews was content to tread water in the present, rarely glancing over his shoulder. His second book, *Sleek for the Long Flight*, is a definite step in some direction, and all the signs seem to be pointing backward in time.

The "present" leads him directly backward or downward to a place where culturally determined identities blur, opposites lock hands, and distinctions—primarily those between the human and the nonhuman—are canceled out. He swerves between two untenable alternatives: a breathing past, a stony future.

In the streambed, a stone
shaped by watersurge:
it looks like the ankle bone
of a lost species grown too graceful.
Evolution makes us sleek
for the long flight.
Finally our common life breaks open,
a pod releasing its stone peas,
and the earth bears in a few places
a few wrinkles in our shapes
for a few million years.

("Stone")

He hops from stone to fern to dog to dolphin to human and back again, up and down the evolutionary ladder, never quite sure what rung the human creature is moored to. He establishes a dialectic between two distinctly contrary wills—cultural and cosmic.

The dog's spine, like a dolphin's,
sews a path between smaller drifts . . .
The house is a sack of sour breath
on the earth's back.

("Snow")

He makes no value judgment about the superiority of the human world as we conceive of it. He praises "the shoulders, as they were wings once" . . . "those blind cows, my fingers" ("Praise"). The parts of his body express a nostalgia for their past.

The lung remembers its life as a tree.
("Two Wine Making Poems")

The snake was the last time your spine
could go anywhere alone.
("The Snake")

Our bodies are perpetually slipping in and out of *this* skin and *that* life as though we were made of fibers instead of flesh, and could expand or contract into the shape of the immediate object of our consciousness. This frenzy to be somewhere else, to be reborn into a tree, a snake, a wing, is both the desire for the death of the human shell and a desire for change. The lung wants out of the body like a prisoner wanting out of a cell. The life processes and the death processes mingle. Matthews desire the death of one "body" in order to gain access to another. The goal of life, then, is not death, but another life.

His project is two-sided: as well as wanting to trace the evolution of the body he wants to open the self to the self.

As far as a sound wave rings out
before it's heard,
that's where the city limits are.

I keep the place clean.
Anything you worship
will let you be its priest.

If I open my mouth
a word falls in.
Gods avoid their shrines.

The streets are paved with streets.
Sleep is my radio and all
the news is true.

("The City of Silence")

To open the self to the self means for all the data (*e.g.*, all the news that is true) that storm through his body and brain to be seen as equal. Sleep and sleep's offspring, dreams, give us access to information that has not been screened or censored by the conscious mind. If his unconscious becomes conscious, if he can turn his shadow-self into another aspect or extension of his self, then it will cease to be a shadow and he will have to face the raw underside of things. It will no longer be possible to romanticize, idealize, or degrade. Things will become what they are. Sex, for example, will become a blunt fact like hunger: neither brutal nor beautiful in itself, becoming what it may be through its taste at a given time.

For Matthews, it is not the culture with its bombs and machines that will open the door to our undoing, but our very foundations, the thing that we call, for lack of being able to live without labeling the ineffable, The Cosmos. Culture, then, is a facade that has already crumbled. What remains is a kind of cosmic undertow that wants to devour us. Matthews has begun to deal with something more fatal than the mind/body split: the desire of the human being to sink back into unconsciousness, to shuck his human body like a shell, to return to a state of being where consciousness will not intrude.

In his poem "Marriage" Matthews shows that identity is another cultural notion with which we will continue to delude ourselves, as though by sheer brain power we could outsmart the will of the cosmos. *Husband* and *wife* are two such cultural concepts that he shows to be inadequate, and the joke is on those who think they are in control rather than tethered, body and soul, to the murky floor of the unconscious.

Sleeping late, I float in bed.
What you can see may be
the top of seventy feet of kelp.
sewn to the murky floor.
Whatever has pushed me all these
years from that slime,
I'm still its slow explosion.
You bob beside me. Time to do
death's work gratefully.
Wake up. We are one
of each other's tasks.
We drift on our tethers.
Death's work is boring
but dangerous. To pass the time
we fall in love and out
and in . . . Our cells get used
to this music.

("Marriage")

Our origins have not lost track of us. They move through our lips with each word we utter, move through our bodies with each gesture we make. The processes of the body, Matthews implies, were once the processes of the earth—and they still are.

Matthews weaves a steady path between the energy he gives off with each fresh perception, and the recognition that each of these perceptions, "like a rung gone suddenly from a

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ladder", bring him one notch closer to his own death.

Suppose the universe
is running down, a clockful
of dying crickets.
("Suppose")

Insight and recognition are inevitably derived from a recognition of how the body works.

The testicles drone
in their hammocks,
making sperm.
Glut and waste
and then the beach invasion
people
everywhere, the earth in its regular
whirl slurring to silence
like a record at the onset
of a power failure.
("Sleep")

By giving "people" a line to itself, he conveys the sense of being genuinely stunned, even stung by the terror of what he is perceiving, encountering. When he is at his best, as he is in this stanza, he has the wonderful ability to make large leaps gracefully without calling attention to his own virtuosity.

But he tends to back off from the implications of his own vision of things, like a horse that loosens a rock beneath which lies a hissing snake. In a blurb on the back of the book Stephen Mooney calls him a "post-Wasteland poet." True enough, only I think his meaning is ultimately more terrifying than Eliot's, who saw the present state of the world in terms of its cultural history. The culprit with whom Matthews is playing and losing (if we take him *at his word*) a game of tug-of-war is no less a formidable opponent than the universe itself. At times he tries to show that he is a nice guy as well as a poet; and when the nice guy intrudes with his cheerful affirmations, the poem dissipates. In one of his best poems, "A Letter to Russell Banks", we have the poet, thinking

of my ancestors and how Wales
and Norway are slivers in the globe.
I dwindle into the woods
and know why they were terrified.
Nobody knew Jamestown
stretched to the Pacific Ocean.
So you cut down a tree,
made a stake, beat it
into the earth and
hung on a flag . . .
Deep in the woods now
I spin suddenly to surprise
and see whatever follows me.

and then the nice guy enters with the following facile resolution of conflicts.

It is the memory of a tail,
the thrash of its absence.

Fish-in-the-wrist,
cloud-in-the-mouth,
go home.

I explain I'm looking for a home.

Stone-in-the-throat,
fern-foot,
fire burns wherever it goes.

All those dough-flecked hands
cupping one flame of solitude!
Mothers, girlfriends, wives
and daughters.

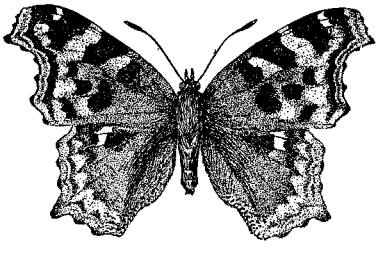
Now the poet reenters briefly.

The spine like a lodgepole of fire.

And the nice guy returns for the finale.

yrs, burning outward
Bill

I'm calling attention to this because one of the strongest tendencies in American literature is to affirm what has already been negated (Styron's great "Between being and nothingness I will choose being."), to disprove what has already been proved, as though it was fun while it lasted but we were only kidding. The teller blasts his tale. Let's have a few beers and say things ain't so bad after all. The ending of this poem really trivializes what came before. It is, after all, a poem written to a friend whose wife has just had another daughter, but the ending is Matthews reminder to himself that his intense vision of men hacking a life out of the wilderness is off the track of his original intention: to commemorate the birth of Russell Banks' daughter.



And yet the playful tone of the poems in no way diminishes their seriousness. The self-mocking of "Narcissus Blues" comes to a bitter end with the resolution that people are as unchangeable in death as they were in life. The message contained in a person's last words is the sum of a life as lived, not as that person imagined she should have lived.

May you wake in your body
like a drunk alone in a lifeboat,
a sealed letter
from your dead mother.

Why is the letter sealed? Perhaps because its contents are already known and known to be unfathomable. And I don't think the letter will ever be opened. We can't know the dead any better than we know the living, and the truth, sent as a message, has always been sealed, concealed—the lives captured inside these desperate "messages" went down sealed to themselvse, like creatures drowned in a cocoon that never opened.

Matthews poetry proposes that we are presently burying ourselves under the weightlessness of our self-consciousness. As for the chance that we might survive our devolution, we would have to call for reinforcements by acknowledging that they are already here, in our bodies. It is bodilessness that weighs us down. Matthews work begins to fulfill the implication of John Donne's idea that "The body makes the mind": an idea that got covered up, lost, misplaced, forgotten, or merely neglected for a few hundred years and is just now being unconcealed again, let to live in the light of its vast but traceable implications. His work can he read as a warning: we must stop running away from our bodies, making our minds dance ingenious jigs which get us nowhere but older. Question: if the body has its own rate of evolution, and the mind, for all of its apparent facility to "go beyond" the body (what with progress and science), is finally, ultimately, tethered to it, then is it possible that "man", armed with rationality, is actually retarding himself by seeking and attaining self-consciousness? And if the body does make the mind, we are led to the brink of another question: who should wait for whom?

—*Mark Rudman*

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Brief Poetry Notices

SYNECDOCHE

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ = Remarkable
☆ ☆ ☆ = Fine Work
☆ ☆ = Average
☆ = Dull Stuff

The Breathers, by James Reiss. Ecco. $2.95 paper.

☆ ☆ ☆

A first book, lovely when it deals with real human relationships—especially in a sequence dedicated to the poet's father—annoying when it tries to control fantastic connections between the actual and the imagined. An odd flaw in a metaphoric art.

The Cloning, by Peter Wild. Doubleday. $5.95 ($2.95 paper).

☆ ☆ ☆ ½

A kind of marvel. Poems that are unmistakably American—rich with the sense of heritage, of the tragic misdirections we have followed in taming the land, of our all-too-careless links with the whole of life. This is the real thing, as opposed to the stuff written by people who feel compelled to meet the deadline for their next book, or who think they can live up to the name *poet* merely by bludgeoning a typewriter.

Threats instead of Trees, by Michael Ryan. Yale. $6 ($1.95 paper).

☆ ½

One of those awful books that wears its nerve-endings on its sleeve. The poems are so self-conscious as to defy reading—they are certainly small pleasure—and the figures of women in them are obliged to put up with an offensive repertoire of posturing, whining, and infantile showing-off in general. *The Yale Younger Poets Selection for 1973* (published in 1974).

A House of My Own, by Carl Dennis. Braziller. $3.95 paper.

☆ ☆ ½

Poetry that never raises its voice, that deals gently with nature, with love and friendship, with *place* and its furbishings real and perceived. Not overwhelming work, but perhaps appropriate to most of our insular lives.

The Buffalo Shoot, by Greg Kuzma. Basilisk. $2.50 paper.

☆ ☆

Another ubiquitous poet whose work values understatement to the point of irrelevancy. There is an occasional literary revelation to be inferred from all these meditations on the commonalities of everyday life, but the overall experience is like watching a garage fill up with old newspapers.

To All Appearances: Poems New and Selected, by Josephine Miles. Illinois. $8.50 ($3.95 paper).

☆ ☆ ☆ ½

A grand book. Tough, clear-headed poems whose humanity is a true portrait of the authoress, and whose sensibility is as contemporary as the work of any cult poets you might name. And what's happened to the University of Illinois Press? Is the American literary center really shifting to the Midwest?

Two-Part Inventions, by Richard Howard. Atheneum. $4.95 paper.

☆ ☆ ☆ ½

Remarkable whole-cloth dialogues among famous literary figures: Whitman and Wilde, James and Wharton, *et al*—an episode devised from the life of Hölderlin is the stunning first piece of the collection. America can presently claim no figure more "lit'r'y" or influential than Howard is; these poems are elegant on the page, and their public performance by the author is not to be passed up.

Anthologies

Three recent collections, formed out of varying biases. Each is rewarding; each contains work ranging from fine to dreadful—a continuing and useful lesson in the fallibilities of editorial judgment. *New Southern Poets: Selected Poems from Southern Poetry Review*, edited by Guy Owen and Mary C. Williams. North Carolina. $5.50 paper. The best of this small group. In its 15 years, *SPR* seems to have published most of the better poets in America, James Dickey to A. R. Ammons, Donald Justice to Charles Wright, *et al. Best Poems of 1973: Borestone Mountain Poetry Awards 1974*, Pacific. $4.95. The widest-ranging of the trio, covering the English-speaking world. The editors (a board of some size) claim to make their selections anonymously; the British pieces tend to be "soft" and the U.S. selections are heavily from *The New Yorker*. *Out of This World: Poems from the Hawkeye State*, edited by Gary and Judith Gildner. Iowa State. $5.50 paper. The most encouraging anthology, but the worst titled. The "Hawkeye" state is Iowa, and perhaps it *is* out of most readers' world—though enough poets have sojourned here in the past 25 years to populate a thousand anthologies. For the most part the poets herein are transients; those who are residents are often outsiders who got a) seduced by clean air or b) trapped. What's most marvelous is that this is Iowa State's first timid venture into literature—*O anno mirabile.*

The Jane Poems, by Kathleen Spivack. Doubleday. $5.95 ($2.95 paper).

☆ ☆

A fast-starting collection, the poems arrestingly cadenced, fantastical, cruelly visionary. Then something goes wrong, as if the central persona of all these pieces somehow wore out her bright welcome and became simply one more hypersensitive, marginally hysterical doll fooling around with sex and love and art.

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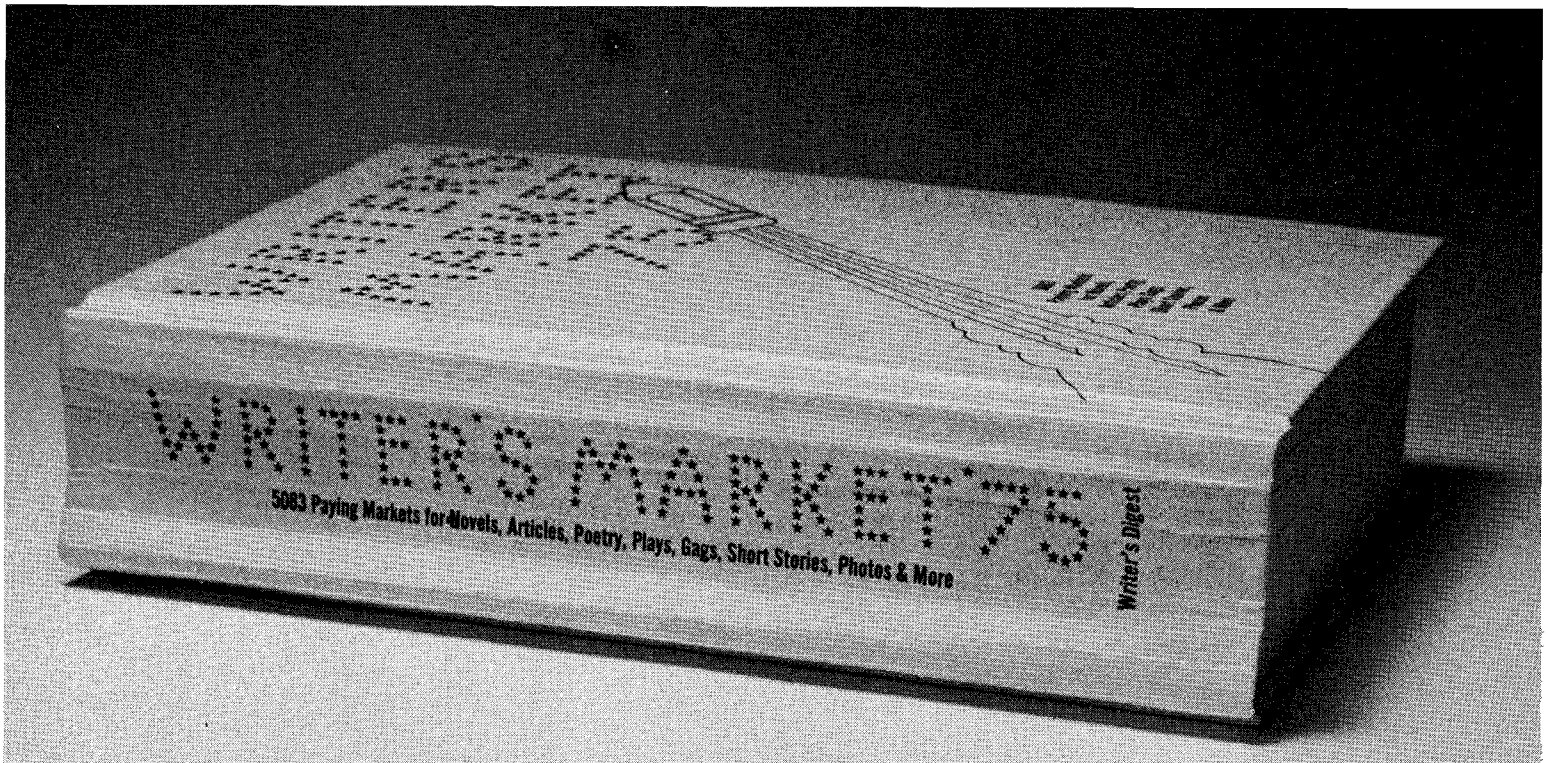

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Lawrence Sturhahn:

It's a Long Way from Your Heart and on the Wrong Side . . . .*

What should the opening sequence of a movie—chapter of a novel—paragraph of a short story be?

The problem a storyteller faces is how to hook the audience to keep listening, not go out for a walk, have a beer, or (as in the classic tale) kill him. Simple as it sounds to say (difficult as it is to do), the appeal is to the inherent human curiosity about what's going to happen next—and after that—and where does it all end?

This is plot, and why the traditional story has a beginning, middle, and end—although not necessarily (these days) in that order.

Curiosity creates a tension between the audience and the plot happenings of a story. And since most stories concern people it is through their action or the lack of it that the story progresses. The interaction between people is drama; again the appeal is fundamental. Either audience recognizes and identifies a character within its own collective experience, or, not recognizing, is curious to be shown.

Money and/or fame may be *why* an author bothers. But behind that—hopefully—is an idea about the workings of the world. Theme, both the story and the characters in it are a way of illustrating or expressing it.

And the way it's done—with a hammer or a feather—is the style.

* * *

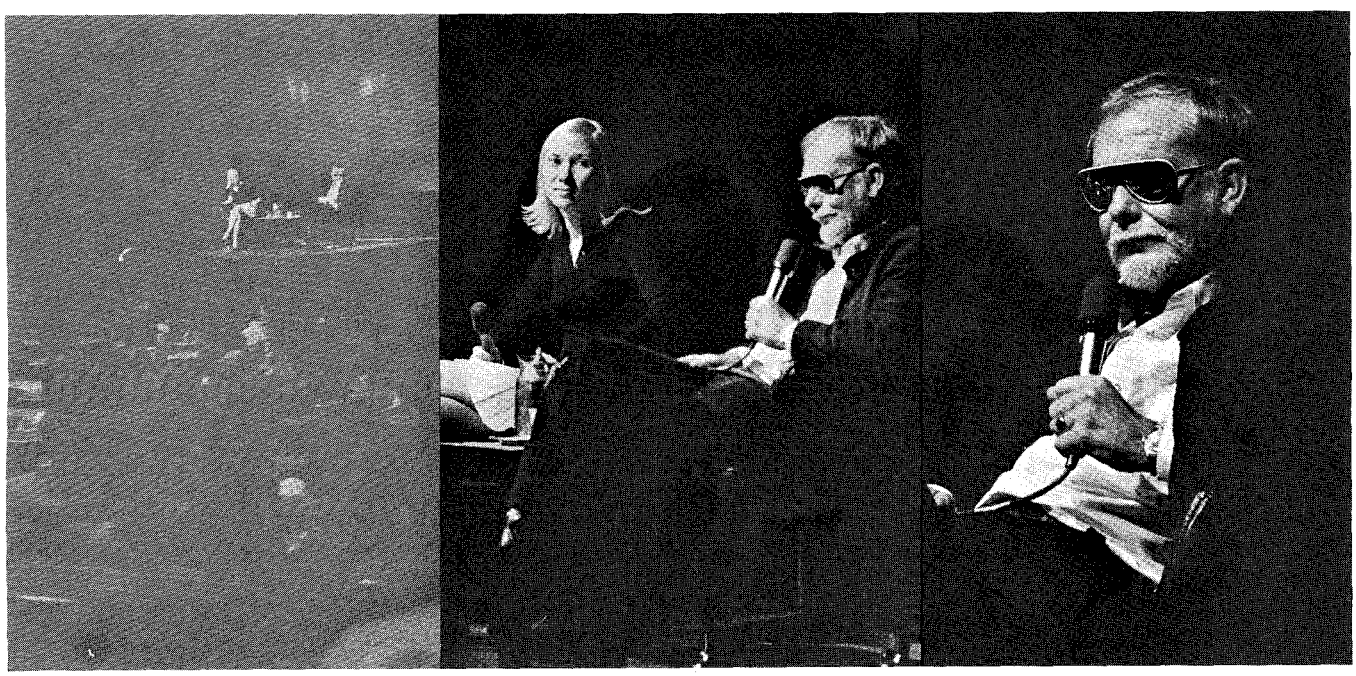
The main title/opening sequence of "The Wild Bunch" establishes four disparate visual impressions which almost immediately become synchronous.

A squad of neatly uniformed U. S. Cavalrymen in formation—William Holden (Pike) in command—trot into a town. The close-up flash of some things alive and writhing resolves into a small arena compacted with pale scorpions and dark ants attacking each other; revolting as the spectacle is, in the film it's witnessed with pleasure by a group of Mexican and North American children, boys and girls about 10 years of age. Under a canvas fly a company of stolid townsfolk are being excoriated by an evangelical preacher; the demon is drunkenness. Men with rifles are on a rooftop, the only one among them not thoroughly disreputably evil looking, the one who gives the orders, Robert Ryan (Thornton).

Past the children's mini-circus the cavalry trot. The temperance meeting breaks up; a straggling parade forms to march down Main Street with placards. The men on the roof, guns readied, are cautioned to keep hidden. The cavalry dismounts and walks toward the bank, carrying their saddle bags.

Although it's uncertain after the fact in exactly what order the *what's-going-to-happen* becomes clear, in a shorter time than it takes to *read* the description of the happenings a viewer becomes aware that—in a welter of contradictory and frightening impressions—these soldiers are robbing the bank, the ugly men on the roof are waiting to ambush them, and the moment of truth will inevitably occur just as the townspeople

*dialogue fragment from a Sam Peckinpah film



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are in the line of fire. And that the ants, scorpions, and children are symbols for all of it.

The shoot-out is next to indescribable: the exploding violence of the two armed groups exchanging volleys, men and women down on the street, bodies falling from up above, horses rearing, bullet holes stitching along the wooden walls and across the dirt street, packets of blood exploding—much of it in slow contemplative motion. As the remnants of Pike's irregulars (and the viewer is not sure why more of them aren't dead) gallop out of town, again they pass the ant and scorpion enclosure which the children have now set on fire. The audience can watch the burning, close up, in crackling color.

Through this agglomeration, now and again, for principal actors to be identified and creators credited, the positive film image is changed to negative and the frame is frozen so the titles can be superimposed. In the bank, the employees hostage under the gun, when Pike is asked what to do if they make a false move, he turns and orders viciously: "*Kill them!*" The credit that comes on the screen after this moment is to the director—Sam Peckinpah.

II: Getting Too Dark—Too Dark to See . . . *

In the '50s he worked in television, both film series, *The Rifleman* and *The Westerner* (which in those days were half an hour), and specials like "Noon Wine."

Not necessarily in historical order and perhaps an incomplete list, his theatrical films are: "Ride the High Country," "Major Dundee," "The Wild Bunch," "The Ballad of Cable Hogue," "Junior Bonner," "Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid," "Straw Dogs," "The Getaway," "Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia."

This past fall he was invited, and came, to do a special program of his own work at the San Francisco International Film Festival. After a retrospective screening of two of the half hour films (one of which, "Jeff," was described as his favorite), "Noon Wine," and selected cuts from the features, he came on the stage, carrying a cup of whiskey and wearing dark glasses because, he said, he was

* song refrain from a Sam Peckinpah film

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used to working behind the lights, not in front of them.

The house was full, but it was impossible to define how large the contingent either of supporters or detractors was; the applause was thunderous at times, but in it also were cat-calls and shrill whistles. And many of the questions directed at him were filled with overt anger and critical contempt.

Enjoining them to "*Call me Sam—for Christ's sake!*" drinking from his cup, he submitted himself to everybody, obviously enjoying it. At some point he said, "if you're a good whore, you go where you're kicked."

* * *

"Making pictures," he said, "is an adventure . . . it's a piece of life. You live in compartments, one picture to another. You must understand your story, but most important, you must understand your people. That's why you re-write so much on the set—so the people can work.

"I came back from the Marine Corps where I could handle a light machine gun or a BAR, and then I found I could work with people on the stage."

* * *

There's nothing new to the idea that any sort of creative expression is a reflection of the personality of the author. Look at the photograph of avuncular James Beard on the paperback cover of his cook book, and then in making his recipes note the rich ingredients.

If that seems facetious, then: The setting of "Amarcord" is a seaside town in which Federico Fellini grew up, and the images in the film are more or less tilted off the dead center of photographic reality—as though they were dreams . . . or visions in a cloudy mirror of memory.

* * *

"I realized all the great directors could write. So I got a job on TV, worked as a prop man, a sound man. But I taught myself to write, and out of that came the two series, *The Rifleman* and *The Westerner* . . . !"

* * *

A kind of masked auto-biography is what most works of fiction are, the characters some version of all the personae within an author. In fact the definition of the word *personae* is: the characters in a play or novel (or movie) . . .

The character played by Gene Hackman in Francis Ford Coppola's magnificent and very complex "The Conversation" is named Harry Caul. One theme of that film is the search on the part of the principal to define the difference between what he *does* —the auditory voyeur—and what he is—a compulsively private person. When he finds that his security (his apartment) is penetrated, he's destroyed. Metaphorically he's been penetrated, the secrets opened to the world's eyes.

A caul is the remnant of the amniotic sac in which a fetus is suspended during its term in the womb. Sometimes it covers the head (and *eyes*) at birth.

* * *

"I'm concerned with violence," Peckinpah lectures, "because we are violent people. And this is probably the most violent nation in the world —lets understand that! You must understand something before you can use it . . !"

* * *

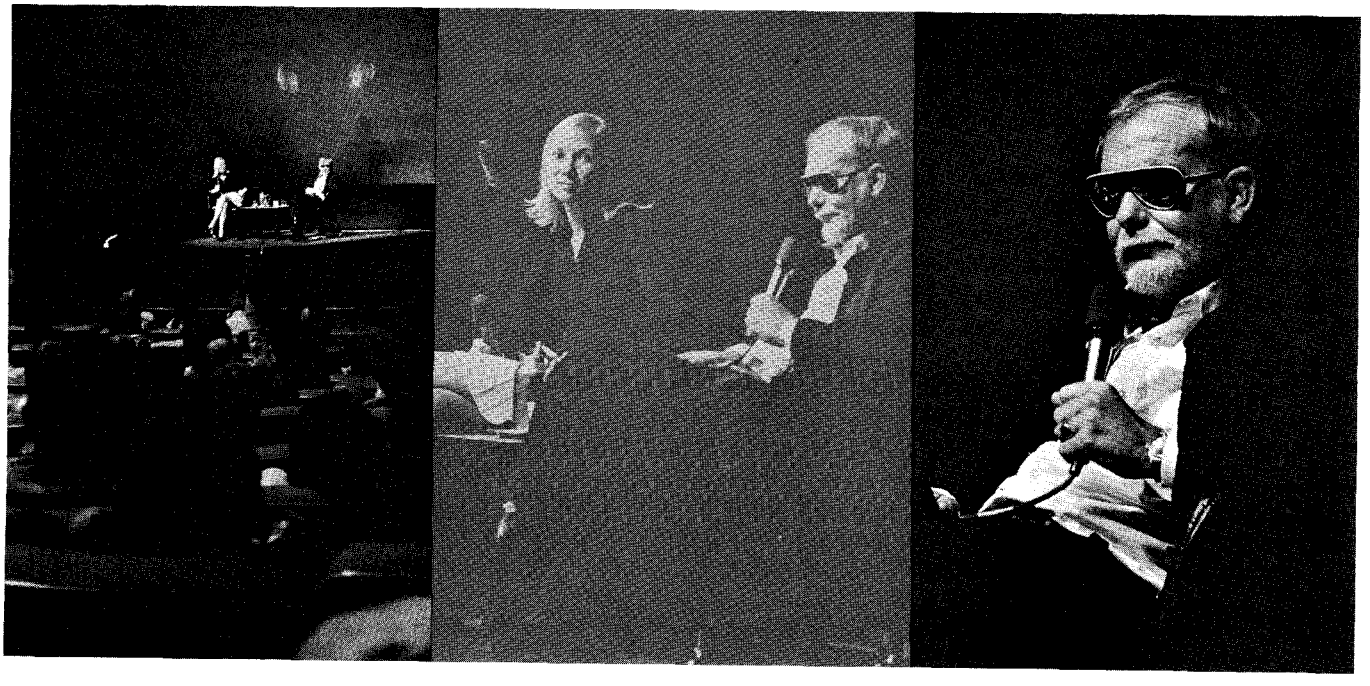
One question he wasn't asked has to do with the caul. Again it isn't new information that some creative individuals are afraid of the attempt to penetrate their gestalt, as though if self-analysis or psycho-therapy is successful some mundane explanation of the creative spirit will result. And once the secret is revealed the talent will disappear, as though talent is a kind of magic which can be exorcised . . and then where is the artist at?

* * *

"Raise your hands," he shouts jovially when he's introduced to the audience, told they will ask him questions, "and bring me a drink!"

* * *

Connected to—as protection for—this suspect concept of creative *magic* there's a hard shell (a caul persisting into adulthood?) that manifests itself in arrogance, in the craziness of



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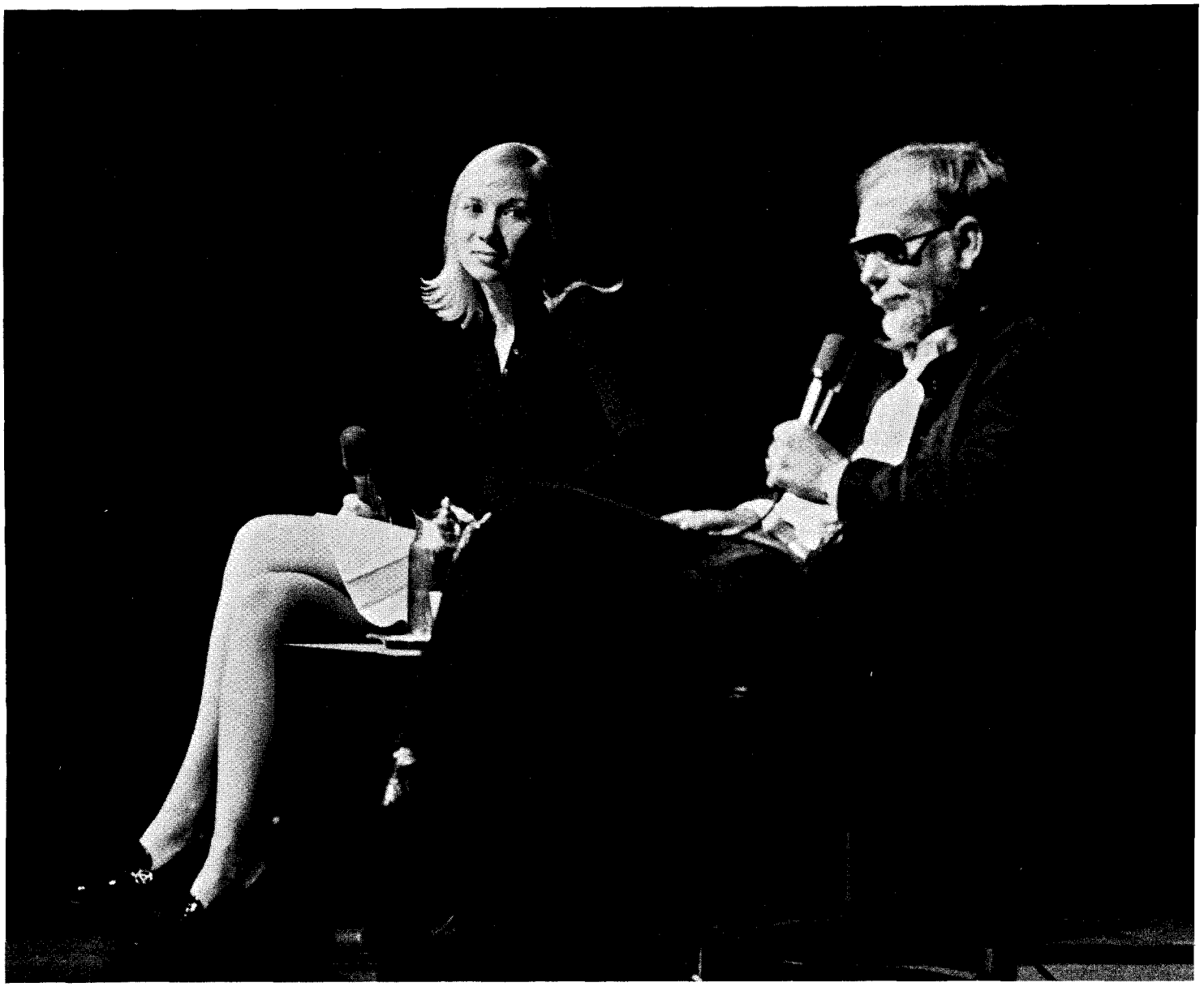

all sorts of demonic sexual and social behavior.

And with it there's a kind of cultural societal permission for the artist to have license, to be willful and intemperate. It's like a child acting out —as children do (often with a certain pride)—irresponsibility.

* * *

When asked the obvious question—Are there psychological implications for the man who makes his name synonymous with excessive blood and guts? he answers:

"I detest the word excessive—I try to show things as they are. For many years I was a violent person by nature. Born and raised in the United States Marine Corps I learned certain martial arts . . . What I didn't like was seeing that Hollywood fiction of what death is. Though not a pretty thing there's a certain gracefulness to it. I do my own thing—that's all . . . I'm called the *Peck's Bad Boy* of Hollywood . . . I don't know why they keep hiring me—if I have to I lie and cheat and steal . . . I certainly don't like living at Twentieth Century Fox, and the spelling of that last word is up to you . . . "

* * *

When asked "Is it possible to lead the kinds of lives the characters in your films do, and not live on the fringe of society?" he answers:

"No."

* * *

Feisty chauvinism and aberrant spoiled-child behavior are acceptable as long as the artist's works are successful (which, in the movie business, means make money), can even be a matter of amused interest on the part of a general public who don't suffer the knife in them. The irony is that out of this same child-self flows the energy necessary to create. The question is, of course, a matter of balance.

III: I use Mexico because I do Mexican pictures sometimes— I live in Mexico—I like Mexico—I like the Mexican people*

In the last chapter of his excellent book on motion pictures, *The Film Idea*, Stanley Solomon writes that "a typical modern non-Aristotelian

* Peckinpah response at the San Francisco Festival

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structure for the narrative film cannot be discerned where we are still in the midst of several developing contemporary movements."

However, he points to three patterns which are visible: 1) " . . . structure that seem formless and consists mainly of joining incidents together . . . ," 2) the ". . . episodic chronicle in which related events occur but the plot development is restricted in terms of the adventures of the hero . . . ," 3) ". . . film constructed around an expanding visual idea conceived in terms of setting and mood and imbued with a moral tone . . . "

Alluding to Fellini's "Satyricon" as an example of the third pattern, Solomon sees the setting—*mise en scene*—the pagan civilization of Rome as establishing the moral tone of the world in which the characters operate.

And it's because film is a series of pictures that the medium can express this so well. The audience, seeing pictures, assimilates the information directly. Then it is free to watch the drama of the character's interaction; automatically, on two levels, things are going on. A thematic statement is made. As Solomon writes, "the setting, indeed, becomes the life style of the characters, not just revealing their background but defining the entire scope of their personalities."

* * *

"*Mexico Lindo!*" Angel, the young handsome Mexican member of the *wild bunch* exclaims, looking across the river they have run to after the explosion of the film's opening robbery and first chase. Presumably it is the Rio Grande; from his tone, on the other side is something to be sought. And—after an important intervening scene in which they discover that in the stolen bags are steel washers and not gold—they come to Angel's home village. Here an interlude occurs in contrast to everything else in the film.

A paternal elder explains to the leader, Pike, how his people struggle—noble peasants that they are—against the oppression of the bandit general, Mapache. In this place children are different from other children in the film; they just laugh and run and play. Peckinpah's camera lingers on reflective close up shots of their open smiles. Pike's men don't stop drinking, and with willing and somewhat bovine women they make love, but there's nothing rapine in Angel's home town; it's a 20th Century Travel Agent's dream.

At some point, under the trees, watching happy dancing to the sound of guitars, the paternal elder says: "we all dream of being children again—even the worst of us." And when—inevitably—they must move on, the colors in the film are muted, music plays, the roadsides under shade trees are lined with sad townsfolk, and somebody runs out to give Pike a rose.

Coming in the film as relief from blood, blurring the collective audience eye with a sentimental tear, it isn't until it's all over that the disbelief comes on.

Also, ideal (and unreal) as it is, buried in it is a vital piece of plot information: Angel's woman from Angel's town has run off to be Mapache's whore.

So, coming *inevitably* to Mapache's headquarters—in another town as different as night is from day—Angel shoots her in the belly for not being true. And that he too is not, psychologically speaking, as stable as he might be is no surprise. It's his mother, the audience find out later, who sells him out to Mapache. His subsequent torture and death at the bandit general's hands precipitates the final cataclysmic (and now classic) shoot-out when Pike and the three remaining members of the gang immolate themselves and destroy Mapache and his brigade in vindication of their code.

In "The Wild Bunch" greed, alcoholism, and hair-trigger tempers are not really problems for a man—women are.

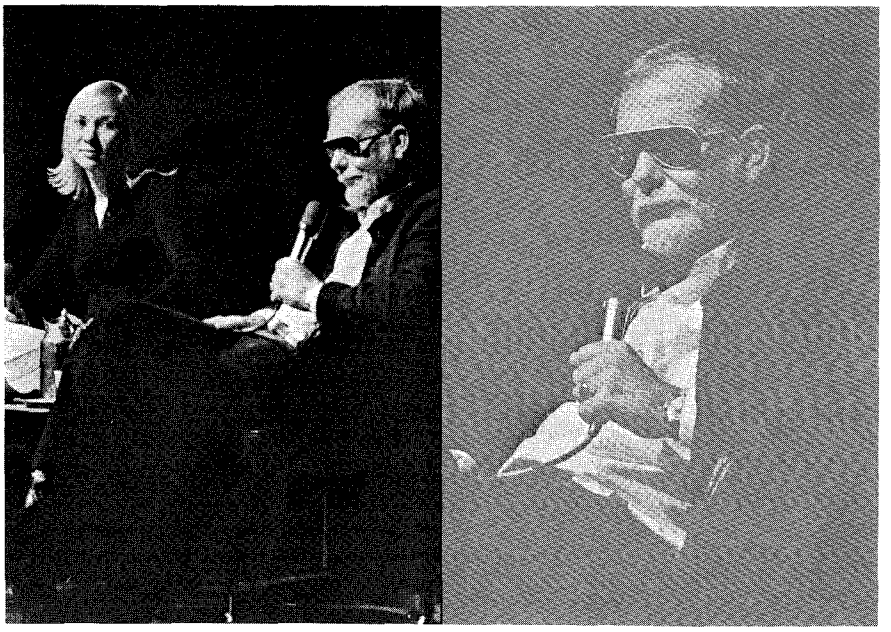
At the festival almost the first question asked, facetious as the tone of the man's voice sounded, was when had he stopped beating his wives. "Which one?" Peckinpah rhetorically asked back—equally as facetious—and then, "When they start punching me out I give up. I've lost three in a row, and that's it."

IV: All My Life I've Been Scared of This Living*

It's impossible to establish the background of every character, show the motivations for their actions, but in Peckinpah's films it seems very little is attempted concerning women. In retrospect it seems gratuitous, a way of working out the plot, that Angel's woman has gone off. Later the audience is given the sight of her in Mapache's encampment just before she dies, and she seems to have been seduced by the opportunity to be depraved. Wanton, blowsy, drunk—she gives the impression the reason is that she's a woman, and that's her nature. Instead of sympathy, her death invokes a feeling of self-righteousness.

If Angel's mother hadn't blown the whistle on him (another plot prob-

* dialogue fragment from a Sam Peckinpah film



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lem?) there would have been no reason for his comrades to invoke the rule from the code, one-for-all-and-all-for-one, and give the film a climax.

In Peckinpah's ritual of men fighting, as fuel before or release after the actual act—if there's time—there's getting drunk and getting a piece of ass (which is always neater and less complex if it's paid for). Even so, contempt evident on Pike's face when he gets dressed and pays, whores shouldn't have their infant children in the same room watching them turn the trick. Whores shouldn't have infant children.

"Jeff," the half-hour early days vintage TV film, and a personal favorite, depicts a savaged B-Girl who, when offered love and saving by her old hometown upright boyfriend come in search of her, refuses. Saying to him, "You want something that never was," her choice is to stay in bondage to the sadistic owner of the saloon in which she works. Who was it said: "A good whore goes where she's kicked"—?

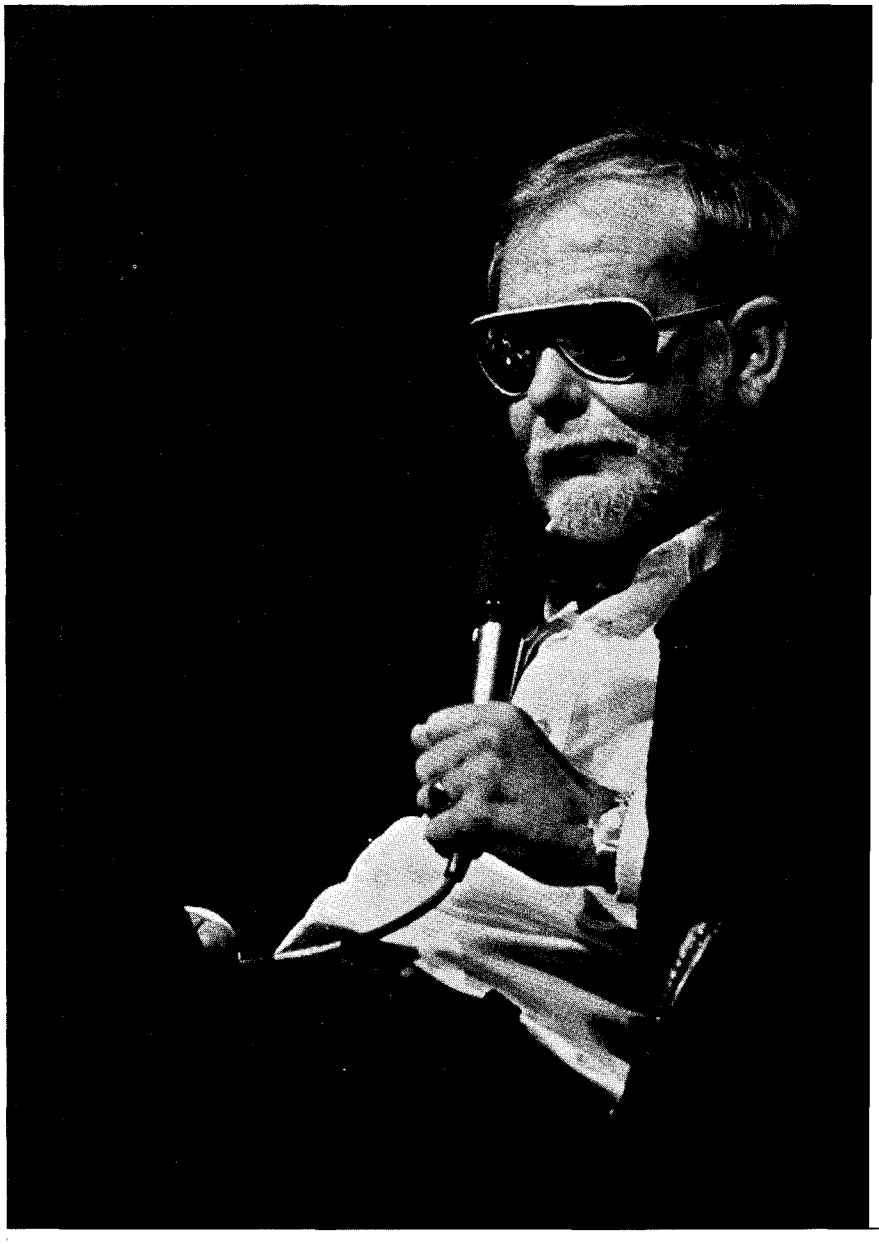
The clip of the rape scene from "Straw Dogs" shown at the festival was very relevant (and quite prurient). From the audience one woman's question about the *women* in his films—asked in a strong and angry voice: "Why do you depict women as whores who like to be raped and kicked around?"

"I don't depict women that way," Peckinpah retorted, "although I happen to have experienced a few numbers along those lines. I show truth as I see it, and if you don't like it that's your problem."

To paraphrase another master: the problem lies not in ourselves but the other—?

V: Bury Me Where the Sand's Soft and the Digging's Easy*

A first impression in "The Wild Bunch" is that Pike and Thornton—pursued and pursuer—are the same character. Their moral sensibilities, although not encompassing drunkenness, murder or rape, are as firmly fixed and uncompromising as any select in any church. For the audience it's a matter of understanding a different set of values to respond to the tilted world that Peckinpah sees. Hooked to a modern concept of the outlaw hero, the demystification of the cowboy mythology of the American past, retribution for a transgression of the code is swift and terrible, a process of the loaded gun.



In the history of the last decade many words have been expended in the examination of the loneliness and alienation that men/women are subject to in the messy lot of modern living. Among the answers that have been offered are commitment, communication, and loyalty—person to person. There's some irony in the expression of these values in Peckinpah's work, though the expression probably accounts for his popularity. It's like his simplistic romantic excesses, his exploitation of violence and lust; they account for the antagonism towards him from some, and the attraction to him in others.

* * *

Some place in the past Pike and Thornton have known each other, have been comrades. Now, to get out of a prison where he's tortured because he's a *hard-case* (like Maggio in "From Here to Eternity"), Thornton undertakes to hunt for Pike for bounty. As it turns out it's not really the promise of the bounty—in the end he relinquishes that—but the *promise* that he's made to do it.

Pike, given to the audience as a man being caught up by his years, says all he wants is one good score after which he can back off. Becoming more and more desperate about it because there isn't that much time

* dialogue fragment from a Sam Peckinpah film

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left as he grows older, and besides that, the times have changed. If picking once was easy now civilization encroaches on the freedom to steal. The band of brothers is an anachronism; knowing it, they revel in their self-pity. As Thornton is chasing Pike to escape from his literal prison, Pike is chasing the illusion of the big score which will release him. The failure of Peckinpah's sensibility is in showing how it's inevitable, not indicating another choice.

Pike and Thornton understand each other intimately, respect each other enormously; they reciprocate a kind of puppy-love. The suspense about what's going to happen next is not so much about the outcome—they are equally matched—but rather what the next shock is going to be. Nemesis is what Thornton's standing in for; each time a plan goes awry it's like a cosmic joke and the only response to that is hysterical laughter—not from the audience but from the characters on the screen.

The cavalry have robbed the bank, been chased, crossed the Rio Grande, come to a rendezvous where they will divide the spoils. After averting a near fatal show-down because two of the gang think the prior agreement about equal shares should be changed —and are thus transgressors of the code for which the punishment is death—when the bags, chunked down with relish, are finally opened, instead of gold the contents are worthless pounds of steel washers. After all they have gone through, all the people dead, the absurd moment is very real. And *THEY* have done it. Amorphous and unspecific this *they* is, a nemesis that always dogs them. What else can the gang do but laugh?

The plot offers them another chance. Mapache will pay in gold for a shipment of US Army rifles to be hi-jacked across the border. The forces moving in opposite directions, coming together, skirting disaster—there's comedy, it's another sequence that shows Peckinpah's mastery of the medium. A chase with a train is followed by a chase on horseback, and that leads to a bridge across the Rio Grande. With Thornton hard on their heels, the wagon filled with stolen rifles gets stuck on the bridge. Dynamite, part of the plan to avert pursuit, is just about to blow. The wagon gets off the bridge; Thornton and his bounty hunters are on it. The bridge goes and drops them into the river.

It was Pike who planned it. They have the guns. The gold is next; it's Pike's success. Suddenly someone brings up Thornton's name; he will come after them—nemesis. *THEY* will always be coming and the end is inevitable. The triumph turns to dust. The stirrup breaks when Pike tries to mount his horse, and he almost falls. Suddenly he's an old man, a leader who may no longer have the strength to enforce the code. Speculatively the pack eyes the wounded leader; there's an echo of cruel vindictive laughter. Have another drink.

Pike and Thornton are masquerades of Peckinpah, cold-blooded, tough, honor-bound. What about Angel—young, handsome, not cynical? His bargain with Pike to participate in the train requires one case of rifles which he will give to the men of his town to resist the tyrannies that oppress them. He wants no money, just the guns. And when Mapache hears Angel is dead. He wins by losing, and stoically he meets his fate. That precipitates the final cataclysm because the others have no choice but to vindicate his death.

The last scene is magnificent—more violence, more bodies, more blood, more shooting (there was a heavy machine gun among the weapons stolen from the train). Everybody ends up dead, Pike with a bullet in the back, fired by a young girl.

Thornton arrives with his bounty hunters after it's all over and the vultures are strutting between the bodies. He takes Pike's gun from its holster as a symbol of their love . . . envy . . . respect . . . He sits outside the gate of the cantonment. He is watching the crazed ugly troop of bounty hunters take out the remains, heads down over their saddles. They are singing "Polly-Wolly Doodle All The Day". He watches the noble peasants carry out the salvaged guns. He's foresworn the reward; in no victory there is no joy. It is his curse to continue to live. And superimposed over these closing images are the faces of the dead men—laughing.

"Sam, I'm glad to tell you I think "The Wild Bunch" is one of the greatest movies ever made."

—A Peckinpah supporter at the festival

Ho-Ho-Ho-Ho-Ho! □

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